

THEY WERE MARRIED!

BY MESSRS. BESANT AND RICE.



PART I.—MON DÉSIR.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW-YEAR'S DAWN.

New-Year's Day, in Palmiste Island, is very nearly the longest in the whole year; it is also about the hottest, if one may say as much without giving offence to other days. It is on this account that the sun on this day, having so much work to do, gets up as early as six o'clock in the morning, an hour before his July time, after announcing his intention by sending up preliminary fireworks in red and crimson. When the cocks see these rockets in the east they leave off crowing and go to roost. If you ask naturalists why the cocks crow all night in Palmiste, they generally say that it is because the island lies south of the Equator. Those who are not satisfied with this explanation are further told that it is by the laws of development and the natural growth of ideas that the Gallic mind has been brought to prefer coolness for times of crowing. The reasons of things offered by science

are, we know, beautifully satisfying, and always make us feel as if we could almost create a world for ourselves if we only had a good big lump of clay and a box of stored electricity and a bucket of water and a pint of compressed air. When the cocks have left off, the white man's dogs, and the Malabar dogs and the Pariah dogs immediately take up the tuneful tale, so that silence shall never be a reproach to the island. The journey performed by the chariot of his Majesty the Sun on that day, a most fatiguing one to his horses, involves a tremendous climb at the start and a breathless descent at the finish; and is, in fact, nothing less than a vertical semi-circular arc in the heavens. The nature of the curve may be illustrated for unscientific persons by any young lady who will kindly raise her arms above the head, and join the tips of her fingers. At stroke of noon, on that day every man Jack and mother's son in the place becomes another Peter Schlemihl, inasmuch as he has no shadow. Strangers, at such a time, creep round houses and great buildings and precipices looking for the usual shade. They go to the north side, the south, the east, and the west, and find none. Then they think their wits must be gone for good, and sit them down to cry. The woolly-pated sons of Africa, for their part, rejoice in perpendicular rays; they have taken the roof off their straw hats the better to enjoy them; they sit in the open, courting their genial warmth; they acknowledge with a grateful sigh that, after all, there is a little heat sometimes to be got in a generally cold and cheerless world. It is not till after seven in the evening that the sun has finished the journey and is ready to plunge red-hot into the cool waves. For five minutes or so after his header there is a tremendous seething and roaring of the maddened water; it is, of course, too far off to hear the noise, but anyone can see the smoke of it, which is red and fiery, cooling down to sapphire and then becoming grey, after which the stars come out, and it is night.

In this English land of mist and fog we never see the phenomenon of sunrise at all; for either it is hidden behind cloud, or it rises too early, or it is too cold for us to get up and look at it. There must be, indeed, many men, quite elderly men, among us who have never seen the sun rise at all. Now, in Palmiste most of the people behold this most wonderful of natural phenomena every day. Perhaps the man on the Signal-mountain has the best view, because

from his elevated position he can see the leaping of the sun from the sea, and the long furrows of light upon the startled ocean, and the sudden renewal of the unnumbered smiles, and the rolling of the mists about the valleys. But, as the man on the Signal-mountain is too often a mere creature of duty, and must always subordinate sentiment to the watching for ships, it is probable that more joy is got out of the sunrise by the people below, who can give their whole attention to the exhibition provided by Nature.

Certainly, there is plenty to be seen down below. There was a pair, for instance, standing in the verandah of the house belonging to the estate of Mon Désir, who seemed, on this New-Year's dawn, to find a great deal of enjoyment in the hour and the scene before them, though there was nothing that they had not seen before, times out of mind. But then they had one great advantage over the man on the Signal-mountain, that he is one and they were two—*Hic et Hæc: Ille cum Illâ*—which makes a very great difference, indeed. And they had other advantages. For, when the sun first appeared to them over the brow of the hill between themselves and the sea he shone on this particular morning straight down an avenue of palms; he painted every leaf of every tree so that it glowed like red gold; as for the trunks, the tall green trunks, he painted them in a great variety of colour, such as carmine and golden red, and a dark green inclined to go off into purple, and a most lovely, creamy, rich, soft brown, which did the eyes good to see, all the more because it only lasted a few moments. The two who looked caught their breath and gasped, so beautiful was the scene. To make it the more complete, because a suggestion of life always improves a picture, there suddenly appeared at the end of the avenue an Indian woman: she was dressed rather better than most coolies' wives, and, being a Madrassee and not a common Bombay person, she wore a long skirt or petti-

coat down to her heels, with a red jacket, and bangles up to her elbows, and, over head, shoulders, and all, a veil of coarse gauze. This is the kind of thing that the rising sun likes: it is good material for a sun to operate upon at his first joyous outset: so he seized upon that woman and turned her into a bride, standing rapt, motionless, waiting for the groom, clothed and veiled, mystic, wonderful, in white lace, and he caused colours inexpressible in words to play about the dress beneath the veil. Only for a moment. Then they raised their heads, this pair of early risers, and saw how, upon the peak of the highest mountain in



the island, there lay another bridal veil, but of cloud, and how the sunshine struck it and it flew back as if the bridegroom was come and would gaze upon the face of his bride. And there were smaller things to note, for the lawn at their feet, not quite like an English lawn, because nothing in all the world is so good as a good English thing at its best, but a well-kept and tolerably smooth lawn, glittered as if it was strewn with a million diamonds and was worth the whole of the Cape, with Potosi and Golconda thrown in; beside the lawn the glorious Flamboyant hung out its flaming blossoms to greet the sun, and the Bougainvilliers proudly showed its purple flowers, and the banana-trees and acacias with their perfumed flowers, and the Elephant creepers, and wonderful things with leaves of crimson and gold and long botanical names, which in England would have had pet and pretty names, welcomed the sun and proclaimed that they had all grown each one twelve inches at least during the night in order to honour the dawn of New-Year's Day.

The house was long and of one story, built with a deep verandah all round it, that on one side forming a kind of general sitting-room, open all day long to all airs that blow, affording almost a quadrangular draught; grass curtains, now pulled up, protected it from the afternoon sun and the white glare of the noon; it was laid with grass mats, and there were long cane chairs in it, and small tables with work and books upon them. Evidently a place used for the daily life. Three or four doors opened upon it; that on the left hand belonged to the private room, or study, or office of Mr. Kemys, Seigneur of Mon Désir; that on the right led into the boudoir or school-room, or retreat of Virginie when she felt disposed to be alone; the door in the middle led into the salon, a large room, with a piano, and a few, not many, engravings, and more cane chairs, with books and magazines—a place not in the least like an English drawing-room, yet filled with the atmosphere of home and refinement—the haunt and home of ladies. Such a house in Palmiste is constructed entirely, so to speak, with a view to the salon and the *salle à manger*. They are the two principal rooms—the only rooms. To the right and left of them on the same floor are the bedrooms; at the corners and in unexpected places, built out as the family grows, are other smaller bedrooms belonging to the children or the girls. The verandah at the sides is provided with *jalousies*, so that it may serve for a dressing-room, bath-room, or nursery. The bedrooms are simply furnished each with a pretty little French bedstead in green and gold, protected by a mosquito-curtain and an *armoire*. There is nothing else, because nobody in Palmiste is expected to use the bed-room for any other purpose than sleep. The *salle à manger*, papered with one of those French designs—a man on horseback, a girl with a guitar, anything—which repeats the same scene a thousand times, is meant for a feeding, or banqueting room, and nothing else. Therefore it contains nothing at all but a table, a sideboard, and chairs. At the back is the kitchen, and one can only say of a Palmiste kitchen that, although many a good dinner is turned out from it, the stranger would do well not to pry into its mysteries, nor to ask of the Indian cook how he does it. Behind the kitchen is a long garden, planted with all kinds of vegetables, European or tropical, according to the season of the year: at the end of the kitchen-garden there is a double row of banana-trees, their leaves blown into ragged ribbons and broken ends, each with its pendent cluster of green fruit and purple bud. And behind the bananas there are the *cases*—the cottages for the servants and their wives; and here there is quite a colony of little brown babies sprawling about in the sun, with no more clothes than Adam before the Fall, and bright-eyed boys, miracles of intelligence, and already eager to learn the various and multiform tricks, lies, treacheries, and make-believes, by which a crafty Oriental may make his way from small things unto great.

On the right of the great house stands a smaller one, called the Pavilion. The son of the house sleeps here, and all bachelor guests, of whom at the season of the "bonne année" there are always three times as many as there are beds to put them in, so that they toss up for the beds, and those who lose make out as they best can upon mattresses stretched upon the floor. Therefore, the New Year is by this arrangement turned into a most beautiful and festive time for the mosquitoes.

The Pavilion has also its own verandah, but much smaller and narrower, and without any curtains or mats. Yet there are plenty of chairs in it; chairs with prolonged arms, in which the occupant may put up his feet; basket-work chairs, with a ledge which may be pulled out for the feet; low chairs in which one's feet need no support; rocking-chairs; and a lovely grass hammock, in which, with a Coringhee cigar, and something with ice in it, and perhaps a book requiring no effort to understand it, and dealing with pleasant subjects, one may while away the hottest afternoon, swinging slowly. There is not much paint left about the old Pavilion, it is true; the floor of the verandah, which is of concrete, is cracked; the *jalousies* of the bed-room windows are out of repair; but the roof is still weather-proof, and the beds are comfortable, and there are these chairs to sit upon, and the verandah faces the east, so that in the afternoon, when man most inclines to rest and meditation, the sun may be avoided.

To the right of the Pavilion, again, was the sugar-house, a great place, with the mysteries of which we

have nothing to do, except that the whirr of the machinery and the wheels, and the loud, well-satisfied breathing of its untiring steam-engine sounded pleasantly on mornings when the crop had commenced. On this day, however—New-Year's Day—the day of the *bonne année*, no man, not even a Malabar, on a sugar estate can be expected to work. Outside the sugar-house lay piles of the white *bagasse*, the refuse of the canes which have been crushed, with their sweet and rather sickly smell; and here, too, was the great barn-like stable for the mules, with the doors always left wide open, because these sagacious animals know very well which is the best place for them, and are far too wise to go straying from a comfortable shelter where they are well fed and well looked after. Why, as they very well know, mules who have strayed have been known to get lost in the ravines, and to tumble over waterfalls, and be eaten by big eels, or to be captured by Maroons, and made to lead a deuce of a life carrying out their villainies in the forest. Who would be the accomplice of brigands and poachers? Beyond the mule stable a road leads to the Indian Camp, a village where the coolies of the estate live with their wives, their babies, their brass pots, their dogs, their goats and little kids, their cocks and hens and chickens, and their pigs. It is quite a large and populous village, in which the dreams of the Socialist are realised; for all the houses are exactly alike, and the people are all on the same social depression, and the way of living is the same for all, and there is a beautiful, monotonous level. There are such villages and communities in England; but they are rare. One such I remember in the Forest of Dean, which seems to resemble an Indian camp on a sugar estate; but even there they have a church and two or three chapels, and there are differences of rank and position. The camp is a noisy place, too; for the babies never cease crying, and the children quarrel continually, and the dogs for ever bark, and the women accuse each other for ever in shrill and ear-piercing voices. What do they accuse each other of? Matter of cakes, my masters, and ghee, and gungee, and cocoa-nut oil, and nose-rings and silver bangles. What farther, one knoweth not. Every day, after a whole morning spent in invective, retort, accusation and defence, they sally forth, and bring the case before the Sahib, the Seigneur and Lord of the estate, who hears the evidence, and makes an award, and admonishes them to keep the peace. They accept the award as final, but yet they do not keep the peace.

And on all sides of the house there stretch the broad fields of the estate, planted with the sugar-cane; narrow paths cross them, and sometimes there is a rough-and-ready tramway. All day long the coolies work among them, cleaning and weeding, heedless of the hot sun, because they are anointed, and beautifully shine, with cocoa-nut oil, so that every man's back is a mirror for his friends. Beyond the cane-fields, on all sides but one, is the forest; for there are yet miles of forest left; and beyond and among the wild woods stand the everlasting hills.

Now, when the first glimmerings of the dawn were welcomed by the silence of the cocks and the barkings of the dogs, there began in the mule stable an uncertain agitation, as of expectancy, and, each in his stall, the mules began to open eyes, to kick out in dreams, to whinny, to fidget, to shake a tail, to paw the ground, and to look around. At exactly the moment, and no other, when the sun first touched the topmost leaves and the single spiral shoot of every palm-tree in the Avenue, the oldest and most sagacious mule left his stall, and led the way out of the stable into the *bagasse* yard, followed by all his friends and lively companions. Then there ensued such a turning over on backs, kicking of legs, rolling about on the soft stuff, champing of the sugary canes, and letting out of heels at each other in pure gamesomeness, that you would have said the mules knew it was New-Year's Day, and had begun at very sunrise to enjoy the holiday. This was not so, however, for mules are a philosophical, albeit a light-hearted race, and know that life is made up of twelve hours' labour and twelve hours' repose. Therefore they do what they can to get through the first half as easily as may be, and go in for unmitigated enjoyment of the second.

After the mules had spread themselves out on the *bagasse*, and the Indians' dogs were all barking in the camp, and the Indian women all scolding, there was no longer any pretence possible for lying in bed. So that the Chinaman who kept the only shop on the estate rolled off his counter, and opened his door, and let down his shutter, and allowed the escape of the night's accumulated fragrance. A village shop in this our native land presents a rich field for research in the science of smells, particularly on a warm summer morning, when it has been just opened. But what is it compared to a Chinaman's shop in Palmiste? Bacon and cheese form our own staple. One cannot deny that these are good, separately or in combination, for the production of a rich and grateful perfume. But the Chinaman, in a much smaller space, has the fragrant and united product of snook, which was once live cod-fish, half-cured pork, rotten bananas, sardine-boxes lying open for a week, a keg of arrack, cheese, gungee, his own opium-pipe, cocoa-nut oil, blacking, and cigars, all combining together to produce a stench of extraordinary strength. When the doors and windows were open it fell out, a solid though invisible lump of concrete smell, irregu-

larly shaped, which rolled, slowly at first, but afterwards more rapidly, down the hill. On the way it encountered a brood of tender yellow ducklings, who were going along—poor dears—thinking of nothing at all but worms and warm mud. These pretty innocents, when the rolling mass fell upon them, all tumbled over on their backs, opened their beaks, and quacked their last. Then the ball rolled over the side of the road down a steep slope, upon which it met and poisoned a promising family of young tandreks, and so over the edge of the ravine, getting broken into a thousand fragments, and doing no more harm to anybody.

Not far from the Chinaman's stood a little cottage, built of packing-cases and roofed with their tin lining, in which there lived an old, old negress, well advanced in the nineties. She was a witch by profession: she revealed the future, either by cards, or by inspection of the palm, or by interpretation of dreams, or by the reading of omens; she charmed away sprains, warts, bruises, and internal injuries by the simple application of her own hand; she cursed people's enemies for them, and made crafty gri-gri, which revengeful persons smarting under a sense of wrong bought and placed under the beds of those who had wrought them that injury, so that these wicked folk presently fell into waste and consumption and slow dying—a joy to behold. She cured all diseases by herbs which she gathered in the forest and under the rocks of the ravine; and it was whispered that if you wanted such a thing as a safe but elegant preparation of poison, which would kill without leaving a trace behind, this good old lady would make it up for you from plants which she would find in every hedge. She, too, awoke with the dogs and the mules, and perceived that here was another day whose joyful course awaited her running. She found her joints rather stiff at first uprising, a thing which surprised her, because she had not been brought up in her childhood to expect it, and she sat for an hour or two in the warmest and sunniest place, with her grizzled old wool exposed to the rays, and so gradually recovered the use of her limbs and got warm, and felt young again, and set to work upon the finishing of a most beautiful gri-gri, with a cat's skull in it and two dogs' paws and a shark's tooth—a gri-gri which was intended to cause internal pains and burnings not to be allayed, and thirst insatiable, and sleepless rolling about at night, and mental distress, loss of appetite, delirium, convulsions, death, and a long black box. And all for five dollars. She is a most useful and admirable creature, and it is sad to think that when she goes—she is not gone yet—she will leave no successor. There used, in the old days, to be plenty of such old women, but emancipation was a cruel blow to them: the new contentment and ease of the negroes discouraged the profession; there is no longer any demand, to speak of, for gri-gri and vegetable poisons; the coolies know for themselves where to find stramonium and what it will do in skilful hands: the old slaves are dead, and their sons are not revengeful on account of their fathers' wrongs, and when this old woman goes there will be no one left to carry on her forgotten craft. The reflection should make the old witch sad; but she does not reflect: she thinks she is still in comparative youth; she takes no heed of time, and she believes she will live for ever.

The two standing on the verandah were a young man of two-and-twenty or so and a girl of seventeen. They were always up first, and they always met here and had their morning talk at sunrise, while the girl poured out the early tea and sent it round to the bedrooms. The Indian boy, who had made the tea and brought it from the kitchen, stood on the steps rubbing his sleepy eyes; and lying huddled up, also on the verandah steps, was old Suzette, the black nurse, in a wonderful blue cotton frock and red cotton turban and bare feet. Her grandsons, Napoleon de Turennes and Rohan Auvergne de Turennes, were at the Grand Collège; and her youngest son, their father, who had gone into the brokery line and been greatly successful, drove about, a splendid personage, in his own carriage. But Suzette remained a nurse; and she was too conscientious a nurse to allow her foster-daughter to get up before her or to remain talking with Monsieur Tom without her presence.

"Chokra," said the girl to the Indian boy, "this great cup for the burra Sahib, and this little one for the mem Sahib."

She spoke, only with these two or three Hindustani words, in the Creole patois, which has been adopted by the Indian and Chinese coolies, and by the Malays, Sinhalese, Portuguese, Malagassy, Somaulis, and all the races who are represented, in this island of a thousand tongues, as the common medium. But, like many who have been brought up on a sugar estate, she was a polyglot young lady: her father was English and her mother French. She spoke her father's language perfectly well, with a tendency to make a soft guttural out of the "r," which was not unpleasant; and she spoke with perfect fluency her mother's language; but she would have been as much lost as any Canadian among the half-uttered syllables and nods and winks which stand for French in fashionable Paris; for, in truth, the French of Palmiste may be pure, but it is a little old-fashioned. And she could talk Hindustani of a kind, not the Hindustani of the schools, to be sure, but the tongue of the people, free and unencumbered by grammar and syntax, and understood of all alike, by the gentle Tamulman, or by him who talks the soft Canarese or the sonorous Pali. She could not talk Chinese, because nobody can, and even the Chinamen out of their native country laugh at their own language;

nor any of the Madagascar dialects, because the Malagassy are a polite people, and do not expect it; nor Malay, because the Malay is quick to learn for himself any language that may be going about; nor any of those African tongues which may yet linger in the memories of the blacks, because there is nothing the East African negro more readily forgets than his own tongue, especially when there is such a beautiful language as Creole lying ready for his use, and because nobody ever learns any African language who can help it.

"The men," said the girl, "are late this morning. I suppose, too, they sat up last night, and drank too much brandy and soda. Did you sit up, Tom?"

She spoke as if too much brandy and soda was an accident which might happen to anybody; and, indeed, in this thirsty island there do happen a surprising number of these accidents every year. So that it is a pity steps are not taken to prevent them.

The young man replied that, for his own part, he went to bed when his father left them, which was at half-past ten; but that some of them sat late, and there certainly were a great many bottles of soda lying on the verandah; and that they were all fast asleep when he got up, which was before daylight.

He had in his hand a pine-apple, which he had just cut in the garden, and was eating it with a fork. This, if you please, is the true way to eat a pine; and the best time to eat it is in the morning, when it has been freshly cut.

"Will you have a mango, Virginie?" he asked. "They are ready to be gathered."

"Send some to the Pavilion," she replied.

"Ayapana tea," he said, "would be more to the purpose. Suzette may go round presently and find out if anybody wants it. If I meet old Pierre, I will ask him to take some *cocos tendres* to the Pavilion. Don't forget the lechis, Virginie."

Ayapana tea is a grateful drink, made by pouring boiling water upon a certain herb so called: its properties are many: it restores tone to the afflicted after a severe night; it cools coppers; it drives away headache; it restores the power of coherent speech; it revives the sluggish brain; in fact, it was planted, in the first instance, by the man who made the earliest vineyard, and he placed a root of it between every vine. As for the *coco tendre*, Tom meant the unripe cocoa-nut, which is gathered for the purpose of providing a cool and refreshing morning draught. In cases which do not require the severity of Ayapana tea, the *coco tendre* is efficacious, and it brings with it a coolness which mounts to the brain and runs along the veins and gives elasticity to the limbs. And as for mangoes, they are good for all conditions of men; the temperate, such as Tom, and the eternally thirsty, such as Sandy McAndrew; they are the sweetest gift of nature to the dweller in the tropics; they refresh and revive after a hot and sleepless night; they bring back hope, faith, and courage; they reconcile one to life even when the rainy season has begun, and the floods of heaven are descending, and a soft and steamy heat lies upon the earth, and a vapour rises like that of a universal washing day, and the mildew grows and spreads visibly on the boots, and the covers drop off the books, and the very cigars go out of curl. These two were too young to know much about shattered nerves, and revivers, and pick-me-ups. But they had heard of such things. Therefore Virginie received the allusion to Ayapana tea with sympathy, and understood what was proposed to be effected by means of the *coco tendre*.

She was seventeen, which is Creole for twenty. And, because she was a Creole, she was of slight and graceful figure; for the same reason she carried herself well and was *gracieuse*—one would like to add a few more of those delightful adjectives which French poets and novelists have at their command. She was dressed in a simple white frock, with a crimson ribbon round her neck.

Nature, who is always—the dear old lady!—thinking how she can spare something more to set off and adorn a pretty girl, had given her a wealth of lovely light curling hair, as soft as silk, which lay all about her face and clung to her pretty cheeks like tendrils of a vine, as if it loved to be exactly in that place and wanted no other; her eyes were blue and soft, with long lashes; her cheek was not ruddy, like an English maiden's, but touched with just the tenderest bloom of colour; for, although she had never left the tropical island, she lived among the mountains—Mon Désir was a thousand feet above the sea, so that the air was sharp. Besides, Virginie rambled and climbed up the slopes of the hills and down the steep sides of the precipitous ravine, and was as sure-footed as a chamois and as steady as an Alpine guide. This it was which lent her cheek its rose. Altogether, a lovely and dainty maiden; a girl on whom eyes were already bent full of admiration and hope; but not yet spoiled, though she had been out ever since the last Queen's birthday ball. Her face and her gestures were full of vivacity, because her mother was a French woman; her eyes were full of truth and loyalty, because her father was an English gentleman; at every turn of her head, at every quick movement of her hand, one was reminded of her descent, because this was French and that was English, and this she caught from her mother and that she inherited from her father.

As for the young man called Tom, he was dressed as only Colonials dare to dress. That is to say, he wore a flannel shirt without any collar and *all* rags, and a pair of flannel trousers, patched and darned in various

places, yet almost as ragged as the shirt; round his waist was tied a belt made of long red silk; he had on a short coat or jacket of common blue cotton, something like that affected by the British butcher: it is strong, durable, and light, therefore it is greatly in fashion among the people of Palmiste, although it does wear white at the seams: for head-covering he wore an old helmet, well battered and bruised. This was his morning dress, the things in which he rode about the fields, looking after weeds and all the evils which assail the sugar-cane. He was his father's manager, and he took this journey every morning, starting at daybreak and returning about ten. He was a well set up youth, not so broad in the shoulder as many Englishmen, with brown hair cropped close, and a small beard and moustache; not a face betokening great intellect, nor had his shoulders the studious stoop; nor was he shortsighted; nor did he concern himself at all about literature or art, or the popular scientific chatter, or the current topics of the day. In fact, very few young men had read fewer books than Tom Kemyss. Yet he was not a fool; he studied machinery so as to understand the engines and works of his mill; he studied agricultural chemistry for practical purposes; he was handy in the carpenter's shop; he was good at all kinds of sports, was cunning of fence, a good shot, and as plucky a lad as ever stepped. And though he had never left his native island, and was seldom absent from his father's estate, he was not at all a rustical person, not a mere *hobereau*, nor a boor. Quite the contrary: his manners and carriage were as good as if he had been brought up in a London square and at Eton and Oxford. And he had been trained by his father in the old-fashioned ideas—which they say, those who know, are rapidly dying out—as to the courtesy, respect, honour and service due to women.

When he had finished his pine-apple he strode away, and Virginie heard him whistling to his dogs, and then there was a mighty trampling of hoofs, because the daily struggle then began between Tom and his horse. The generous steed, being of high mind and proud of his descent, resolved every morning that this should be the last of obedience, and so attempted to bring about a revolution. When the attempt was quelled he galloped away obedient again.

Virginie poured out another cup of tea more carefully than the rest, placed it on a tray, and carried it away with her own hands. It was her mother's tea, and the girl had done this small service ever since she could carry anything.

When she was gone the chokra was left alone. At least, he thought he was alone. Unluckily, he forgot Suzette, and acted as any solitary boy might be expected to act.

He looked about him for a moment. The sugar-basin was filled with the delightful crystal sugar, as sweet as sugar candy, and as sparkling as so many diamonds. It was made in the mill of Mon Désir, and is the best sugar in the world, a great deal better than the white lumps of which we are so proud. The boy knew this fact, and it made his fingers to curl and his brown eyes to glow.

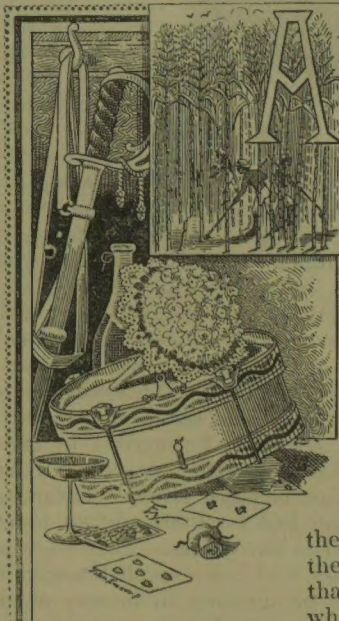
He had never learned the Church Catechism, this poor child; otherwise, no doubt—

Pring! Prang! Crick! Crack! Four, if you please: two on each ear, so that the report was heard a mile off, and every chokra on the estate jumped clean out of his jacket—because he had no shoes to jump out of—in terror and sympathy.

"Hein! Ha! Thou wilt steal, then, good-for-nothing? Take that—and that—little pig of Malabar!" The boy fled to the kitchen, where he was received with the jeers of those who had not been recently detected.

And the old woman sat down on the steps again, in the sun, and laughed with her eyes, her lips, her teeth, her head, her hands, her portly person, and her feet. She brimmed over and she shook with laughter.

CHAPTER II. THE SQUIRE.



MONG the many questions which may be put by fools for the discomfiture of those who pretend to be wise, is the question how it is that men can be found to put their money into a sugar estate.

For the dangers and risks are great; the work is hard; the climate is generally trying; and the ultimate results are wrapped in a delightful cloud of uncertainty. As for the capital required at the outset, that is so great that it would maintain a whole family in England. On the mere interest of

it they might take a house at Kensington, and give dinner parties, and go every year to the seaside.

As for the thing to be grown—the cane—it is surrounded on all sides by innumerable enemies, like everything else which is carefully planted, tended, cockered up, and rendered effeminate. Sometimes it is an insect, which comes from no one knows where, and has no other object in life than just to bore holes right through the cane, and so to destroy it; or it is a worm that appears suddenly in the ground, and refuses to eat anything except root of sugar-cane, and no one knows where *he* comes from either; or it is a kind of rot; or it is a wasting away and a drying up of the sweet juices; or it is some other of the many thousand diseases which affect vegetable life. Sometimes, also, it is a troop of monkeys, who get into the fields by night, and tear up the canes for very wanton mischief. Above all, there are the hurricanes, which lay the canes prostrate, tear them up by the roots, and wash them out of the ground; and they may come any year or every year. So that, unless fortune is more than commonly kind, the end of every planter who has not so large a capital that he can stand up against two, three, or even four bad years in succession is the same—monotonously the same. That end is, in fact, smash; and his estate is sold. And then, because hope goes on springing in that elastic and everlasting way of which we know, there is never wanting a purchaser with a little money to throw away, and the old game begins again, with clinking of glasses and the sparkle of champagne, and the best wishes of friends, and the confidence of the young beginner.

That, however, is only the fate of the small capitalist. If you have got plenty of money to begin with, and want to multiply it by ten, and can afford to wait, and like tropical life and exile, with the things which some weak-kneed brethren call discomforts, such as hot days, and vertical suns, and mosquitoes, and prickly heat, and insipid beef and tasteless mutton, you can do nothing better than take a sugar estate and manage it yourself. Some day people in England will find out how profitable a thing it is, so long as you need not borrow money to go on with. Then there will be companies started. Owners will sell to promoters for four times the value of the estate: that will be good for the owners, who will come to Paris, or London, or Monte Carlo, and have a fling so long as the money lasts: the promoters will sell the estates to the shareholders for ten times their value: this will be good for the promoters, who will make money by one swindle, to lose it in the next: then the companies will issue shares, publish prospectuses, and exhibit their sugar in grocers' shops; and they will appoint managers of local experience. These managers will be so experienced that they will sell the sugar, receive the money for the coolies, put everything in their own pockets, and bolt, working their way round by New Caledonia and Tahiti to San Francisco, and from there to New Orleans, enjoying the roses and rapture of gambling-saloons, bars, and billiard-rooms. The company will then "bust up," and the estate will be sold for half its real value to a local person with no money but what he borrows from the bank, and all will go on as before, and, if we are all happy, let us not sit down to ask what odds.

The proprietor of Mon Désir, Captain Kemyss, commonly called the Squire by his English friends, became a planter through falling in love. It was in this way.

About five-and-twenty years ago, when people in Palmiste were beginning to think that they might try to forget the calamity of their great and terrible cholera year and to leave off telling each other horrible stories, there arrived in the island an extremely sprightly regiment, the officers in which were nearly all young, rich, and disposed to make things cheerful for themselves and all their friends, so far as lies in the power of the English officer. They manifested this disposition from the day of landing; they received callers with effusion; they called upon everybody, bought horses, dog-carts, buggies, pony-traps, American traps, drove about the country, accepted invitations to all the planters' houses, turned up uninvited to the Sunday morning breakfasts, held magnificent guest nights, allowed their band to play as often as they were asked, and gave balls the like of which had never before been heard of. Also, they offered prizes and cups at the races, and rode to win them; and they had an eleven, and for the first year or so they played the national game with vigour: they were always pleased to see everybody in barracks at all hours and at all meals; brandy and soda was continually being produced: they exhibited and kept up, to the admiration of philosophers, a real Charles Lever-like air of solid, substantial enjoyment of life, as if there were no headaches, as if youth would always last, as if there was nothing in the world to care for beyond sport—in moderation; cricket, billiards, and racquets—always in moderation; parade and drill—in strict moderation; gambling—in tolerable moderation; feasting, drinking, and love-making without stint or stay, moderation, or any restraints beyond those imposed by physical consideration, such as the dimensions of the waist or the absence of the opposite sex. The Colonel looked young, being about forty-eight, but he was tough—besides, the resources of science were called in to maintain the dark glossiness of his hair and moustache; the Majors also looked young, being about six-and-thirty; the captains were in the early thirties and the late twenties; the subs. were all under five-and-twenty. It was a thirsty, toss-pot regiment; a rattling, rollicking, story-telling, song-singing, card-playing, racing, billiard-playing,



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betting, gambling, drinking, sit-up-late regiment; a handsome, flirting, dancing, mean-nothing, detrimental regiment; a regiment, in short, which turned the heads of all the girls with flattery and compliments and dances, and all the things that youth most loves. In this regiment there were a couple of young men—that is, comparatively young, for they had both already got their company—who were close friends, and not, like their companions, wholly given over to sport and amusement; they had, in fact, the unusual good sense to perceive that life cannot be all champagne and skittles. Wherefore they sometimes went to bed early, did not take soda and brandy as a pick-me-up before breakfast, observed a

young fellows; in this, the comparative soberness of their manners and morals was felt to be a standing reproach to their brother officers. It is a safe rule that one must not be more virtuous than one's fellows. Therefore the regiment heard with great relief and thankfulness that not only were these two engaged to be married to girls of the island, but that they were going to sell out at once.

They became, in fact, engaged to two cousins, girls of French descent, who had been brought up together and were to each other as two sisters. They were alike in appearance, in tastes, and in accomplishments; they resembled each other in agreeing to be very much in love each with her own English wooer; they were both young, both beautiful, and both amiable. They differed, however, in one small point, felt by both young ladies to be of no importance whatever; namely, that

the man with the scarlet jacket. In fact, they were

the small minority which among every madcap crew are always found to spoil sport by squaretoed temperance. In any other company they would have been considered as rather dashing

liberal moderation in strong drink during the day, and did not look upon all pretty girls as made solely for the amusement of

military bearing still; he was a Member of the Legislative Council, and was, therefore, the Honourable Captain Kemyss, and in the whole Colony there was no one who bore so good a name, or was held in such great honour, or was more regarded for integrity and trustworthiness in all his doings as he.

His life would have been perfectly happy, but for a certain grim spectre, which would not be confined in a cupboard, but kept marching about with him wherever he went; stood behind him at dinner; sat on his bed at night, and never left him. It was the lean and gaunt ghost of bankruptcy. He first raised this ghost by much calculation and sad foreboding in the hurricane year of 1868; two or three good years laid it in the Red Sea; then bad years followed, and up it sprang again, vivacious and sprightly as Jack-in-the-Box, and more horrible to look at. After that it was never laid again, but came every year nearer to him, looked larger, and shook a more threatening finger. Some men are so thick-skinned that, although they see the danger afar off, and know that they will shipwreck upon it, yet they go about their business in perfect happiness, regardless of the certain future. The Squire, who was as courageous as most men, trembled and shook with shame and terror when he thought of the word bankruptcy. The year 1880 was, for the estate of Mon Désir, a bad year; the yield was poor; it seemed as if the soil was, perhaps, giving out; prices were not high; the crop was short; the bank was beginning an ominous note of warning. Still, if 1881 was good; if there were no hurricanes and prices improved, the estate would pull through somehow, as it had pulled

one was rich and the other poor. Captain Ferrier, the grandson of a Peer, who married the rich girl, was himself already tolerably well provided; Captain Kemyss, the son of a Bishop, who had only a moderate patrimony, married the one who was poor. Now, if he had stayed in the Army, or had gone home and lived quietly upon his modest income, he would have got along very well. But when he found that Ferrier intended to remain in Palmiste and cultivate his wife's sugar estate; when he learned, further, that his own wife would like nothing in the world so well as to remain all her days in the place where she was born; when he considered the fertility and goodness of the land; when the pleasures of a planter's life were pointed out to him, with the chances of a great fortune, he yielded to temptation and bought an estate. Observe the difference at the outset between the two friends. Captain Ferrier married a girl who was the only child of a planter with the largest and most fertile estate in the island; with his own money and with the money already made out of the estate he would be enabled, whatever happened, to ride out the storm. Therefore, with ordinary care, his prosperity was assured. Captain Kemyss, on the other hand, invested the whole of his own very moderate fortune in purchasing an estate. To complete the purchase he had, like most of his brother planters, to borrow of the bank a third of the purchase-money at nine per cent. He therefore became, for life, a man encumbered with a hopeless debt. One son was born to him, Tom by name, now his manager, partner, and overseer. His friend Ferrier had several children, but all died except one, a girl—Virginie. When Ferrier died himself, during the great fever year of 1867, Captain Kemyss became the guardian of the child and the executor of the will. Madame Ferrier and her daughter came to live with him, and they formed, Creole fashion, one household.

There are some men to whom the backwoods or colonial life, far from friends, seems to strengthen and deepen their old ideas about the most desirable manner of life. Captain Kemyss—the "Squire"—carried on in the quiet Palmiste bungalow the kind of life to which he had been himself brought up. He was on his tropical estate an English country gentleman; he educated his son in his own ideas; it was through him that Tom showed no rusticity, and Virginie no Creole insularity. He was now a man of sixty; tall, grey-headed, with a grey moustache; he had a

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through so many years before, by being able to meet the interest of the debt; if not, if anything at all of the many things which might happen went against him, then, then—the blow could no longer be staved off—he must go to the wall. The prospect, to a man turned sixty, of seeing the whole of his life's work destroyed and brought to nought, was a very terrible thing to consider.

There was one way out of the difficulty; one certain way; yet it was a way which he would not suffer himself to dwell upon. How if Tom were to marry Virginie? For then there could be no more troubles about money. The two estates—hers, large and prosperous; his, small and struggling—adjoined. They could be worked with the same mill and machinery. Tom could manage both. No one knew better than himself, the trusty executor and guardian of the child, how, year after year, good and bad together, her estate brought in a clear income of eight thousand pounds at least; and how this money had been accumulating and piling up during Virginie's minority, until it was now, for a land of small capitalists, an enormous fortune. But to consider the girl, almost his own daughter, as the means of rescuing himself from difficulties was a dreadful thing to him.

Meantime, there were two persons who were as desirous of seeing this result as Captain Kemyss, with the advantage over him, that they did not conceal their wishes.

"Sybille," Madame Kemyss would whisper when she saw the young people together.

"Lucie," Madame Ferrier would reply, pressing her friend's hand, silently.

The cousins who were so much alike in youth had grown alike again in middle life. This is a trying time with most women: they have lost the later beauty of womanhood, and have not yet put on that of age. These two ladies, however, were still beautiful, in the soft and graceful Creole way; only they looked older than they were, which, perhaps, helped them. They were past forty; and they looked, somehow, though their hair was neither thin nor grey, nor were their faces crow-footed, as if they were past fifty.

"In France," one would say to the other, "we should have settled it ourselves by this time."

"In England," the other would reply, "the boy would have settled it with the girl before this time."

"Tom is a good boy, Sybille. Perhaps he fears your possible displeasure."

"He is a very good boy, Lucie. That is why I wish he would tell Virginie that he would like her to be his wife."

The only reason why Tom did not tell her this most undoubted truth was that he was a Creole. Now all Creoles are perfectly happy with the present condition of things, provided that ensures a sufficiency of curry and claret and a roof. It is a land of sweet contentment. Tom was profoundly in love; but then he had been in love with Virginie ever since she was born; there was nothing new in that. It was impossible for him to think of life without her. On the other hand, things were so pleasant as they were, that it never occurred to him to desire a change. They tell a story in Palmiste of two Creoles who once lived there: they were devotedly attached to each other; they went on year after year enjoying a protracted spring time of love; their parents died; they still continued their gentle courtship; the years passed on; they became grey and bald; still they met day by day, and had their little lovers' quarrels and the fond renewings of love, quite in the Horatian style; when one was seventy and the other sixty-eight—though, to be sure, they still felt like

was innocent of any thought of love, just as she was wholly and entirely ignorant of the world, of humanity, of evil, wrong-doing, treachery, and deception. To be sure, the coolies were always in trouble, always suffering or inflicting wrong; always deceiving, cheating, thieving, and quarrelling. Only, what coolies do, regarded as part of humanity's statistics, is only interesting to those who are able to take a broad and catholic view of mankind, therefore not interesting to those who live among them. In other words, the white residents in Palmiste disclaim the brotherhood of the coloured man. It is difficult to understand the ignorance of such a girl so brought up. She had not only never left the island, but had never slept off the estate, except once, when she went to a Government House ball, and once when she went to a garrison ball, six months before this time. She had been educated by her mother and Madame Kemyss; her guardian took a share in the teaching, too; the only friend of her own age was Tom; he was her companion and confidant. She knew nothing of society, except as she saw it at home when people came to stay. There was no art whatever within

her reach, except music, which her mother taught her; there was no church even within reach, and the Sunday was only marked by the reading of part of the English prayer-book; there was no talk of literature, because her guardian had but few books, and she had read them over and over again; there were no politics.

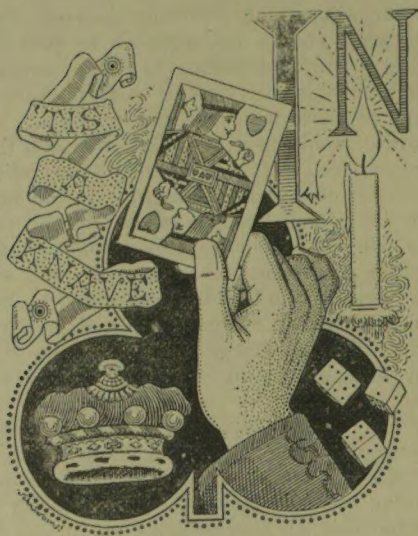
As regards European events, they are treated on these estates with about as much concern as if they were the events recorded in Gibbon. There



twenty and eighteen—a friend suggested that it might be almost time to complete the long engagement by a wedding. They considered for a few months; they thought the suggestion reasonable; they were married; but they had so long been lovers that they could not bear to give up their old habits, and they presently separated with mutual consent, went back each to his own house, and "carried on" as before.

As regards Virginie herself, she was young; she had never considered or thought of the question at all. She was undoubtedly very fond of Tom; it seemed as if life without Tom would be impossible. But, as yet she

were wars and defeats, and many thousands slain; treaties made became treaties broken; the victor was flushed with conquest, and the enemy rolled sullenly over the frontier. Historians never alter their sweet flowing style, because the events of history are always the same. To the dwellers in this far-off land the events of the present are no more real than the events of the past; to Virginie, as she heard them summed up when each mail came in, they were shadows and unmeaning things. The realities of life were the morning and evening rambles, the flowers, the water-falls, the hills, the fruits, and Tom.

CHAPTER III.
IN THE BACHELORS' PAVILION.

IN the pavilion the lazy bachelors began, one after the other, to stir, sit up, curse the mosquitoes, and finally to get up and come forth, clothed, for the most part, in ragged flannels and rough tweeds which had known service and were stained and torn. There

was great diversity as regards hats; for some had broad Panama hats, with brims like the spreading amplitude of a family umbrella; and some had the ordinary round hat of the period, generously endowed with flowing puggrey; and some had solar helmets; and one, which was the Padre, wore the ecclesiastical broad-brimmed felt which we all know and love so much. He also wore the long flapping coat which, with the broad felt hat, makes our ecclesiastics almost as graceful to look upon as their brothers of Spain. One only among them appeared as if he was dressed for a battue in an English preserve, perfectly turned out in garments which made one or two of the younger men ashamed of their rags. This was the Honourable Guy Talbot Ferrier, Virginie's second cousin, only son and heir of Lord Ferrier, and a Captain in the Line regiment now on garrison duty at Palmiste.

Most of the party knew each other as only colonials can know each other—that is, with a perfect knowledge of all the strong points, weak points, good qualities, bad qualities, virtues and vices which distinguish their brethren. Not the least use for any of them to pretend to sail under false colours, or to put on side of any kind. Of course they did it, but it was no use doing it. Among them was Sandy McAndrew, of the great Scotch Firm of McMull, McAndrew, and Company. The only fault of Sandy, regarded as a man and a companion, was that he generally fell asleep during dinner. In other respects he was perfect. Then, there was Davy McLoughlin, his partner, remarkable for the fact that his legs after dinner had a tendency to tie themselves into knots, which is an embarrassing thing to witness until you get used to it. There was also the Pink Boy, who was only nineteen, and had but just arrived, and as yet had not had time to display his many admirable qualities. But he was good at laughing; and he was as handsome as Apollo; and he blushed, which, I believe, that god never did. His tweeds were almost as good as those of Captain Ferrier, but they were in different style, because the Boy was not a noble sportsman at all, but an accountant in a Bank. And there was the Assistant Colonial Secretary, a person of very great importance in the official world; in private, a great retailer of good things, with a prodigious memory; so that, once started, he would go on with stories new and old for a livelong day, and very often did. He knew every man, woman, and child in the colony, and had an excellent story to tell about each; a cheerful, even a jovial companion; and he was of the persuasion which allows a curly crisp brown beard to remain upon the chin as a complement to the curly crisp brown hair.

There was also Major Morgan, who came with Captain Ferrier. He was a soldier by profession; but his principal occupation was the playing of cards, which was the reason why he was so frequently the companion of the younger man. Though he was entirely addicted at cards, and found in the changes and chances of the pips the only joy in life, and though he played to win, he was not a gambler. It will never be said of the Major that he was in difficulties by reason of his losses at cards; rather, it may be safely prophesied of him, that in the immediate future, when he has retired from the service, he will begin a long and tranquil career as a morning, afternoon, and evening whist player at his club. But at present he is still young enough to play any game that offers, whether écarté, loo, lansquenét, baccarat, bézique, cribbage, whist, poker, euchre, all fours, monty, picquet, sech-und-sechzig, or nap. A cheerful man, who generally won, and therefore regarded the world as a place where justice is accorded to merit.

The Professor—his name was Percival—who had been a resident in the island for four or five years, was always to be found at Mon Désir at the *bonne année*. Perhaps, when he arrived, he had entertained hopes of introducing energy and activity of mind and body into the lazy colony. All such hopes, if any existed, were now gone; he dreamed no more of fostering a love for culture, being quite persuaded that things would go on their old way whatever he said or did. This is, after all, a philosophic line to take; even in quite temperate zones it requires an amazing amount of talk, persuasion, entreaty, tears, expostulation, kicks, shoves, cuffs, boxes on the ear, admonitions of stick, to move the people a small six inches; in tropical countries it wants ten times the energy to produce a far more miserable

result, and fever is the almost certain consequence. Therefore, the Professor sat down, and said that uncultured man was probably as happy as he of the æsthetic crowd; and that, for his own part, he should cultivate his garden—which words, like those of Candide, were an allegory. He found himself much happier when he had ceased to make himself unhappy about the downward tendencies, swinishness, and grovelling of the islanders. He was cheerful again; he recovered his spirits; began again to tell stories, and regarded life as an optimist. In person he was shorter than most; he made up for that by being broader than most; he wore a big brown beard and spectacles; he had a catholic taste for wine of all kinds, if only it was good, and was almost a Frenchman in his admiration of all pretty women.

There was one other guest whom one should notice among all the rest. It was the Padre.

He was young, quite young, and enthusiastic. When he left Oxford to be ordained a Bishop's Chaplain for Palmiste, he thought he was coming to a place which was crying aloud for the guidance of the Church. He dreamed of an obedient and docile flock, patiently awaiting instruction. He would instruct them; he would guide them—to be sure, he had only, with great difficulty, secured a humble third in Moderations—he would lead them. And to ecclesiasticism of the Keble College kind he would add, by degrees, æsthetics, athletics, art, and culture. There was not as yet, in the whole island, one single piece of blue china, nor a peacock's feather, nor a picture of the latest school, nor a ballade of the prig-poets, nor any old silver, or lace, nor ritual, nor vestments, or incense—all were downright sturdy independent Protestants, Scotch Presbyterians, and so forth. So that a deep depression fell upon the young man's soul. He was so young, too, that he could not bear to see things going on without joining in them; and so sensitive that he felt the ridicule of his own long skirts; and so sharp that he saw how his profession was more respected than beloved, and that his presence was too often a *gêne*. Then he was too sincere not to be grieved by the thirstiness of his companions, their random talk, their "wild words," their readiness to play cards, and their eagerness to laugh at a good story. He tried to tell a few good stories himself, but perceived with pain that he did not succeed in making his hearers laugh. A tall, thin young man, with the narrow, high forehead and straight features often found in enthusiastic young clergymen; one of the kind who affect great thirst for knowledge with the air of having known it all beforehand; who have an exasperating way of saying "Yes, yes, yes," to whatever is said; and a man perfectly sincere, perfectly virtuous, honourable, and religious, whose life is bound to be a failure because he understandeth not his fellow-man.

As they came out upon the verandah of the Pavilion, one by one, they began to disperse. The Assistant Colonial Secretary observing the remarkable neatness of the Padre's dress, the length of his skirts and the glossiness of his trousers, proposed to take him for a pleasant walk among the hills; they set off together. Those who saw them start reported an ominous twinkle in the Secretary's eyes, and a courtesy in his demeanour, not always remarkable in his treatment of the Cloth. When they returned, about nine o'clock, the Padre's long coat in ribbons, and his glossy trousers held together by pins and bits of string, they remembered that twinkle, though the Secretary now takes blame to himself, and says that he ought to have taken thought of the Chinese raspberries and other thorny underwoods on that hillside. He may be very sorry, but his impersonation of the Padre in a thorny thicket caught by the skirts is funny, and has been known to make even the Bishop laugh. As for the Professor, he went into the garden and cut a pineapple, and found a shady place to eat it in. Then he returned to the Pavilion and threw himself into the hammock, there to read a French novel, which the Pink Boy thought was a learned treatise, and therefore would not interrupt. Sandy McAndrew took a gun and went to take pot shots at the bo's'n birds in the ravine. His partner, with an eye to business, borrowed an umbrella and went to inspect the canes. And the Pink Boy, left alone because no one invited him to join their party, ventured timidly to the verandah of the house in hopes of finding Miss Ferrier alone and getting a talk. She was not there; but the Squire was, and they went for a walk together, which was not quite the same thing.

The Honourable Guy Talbot Ferrier, born, as Debrett tells everybody, in the year 1853, was therefore on New-Year's Day, 1881, in his twenty-eighth year. He was, at first sight, a singularly handsome young man, whose features were regular, figure tall and upright, and eyes of a soft dark blue. His voice was musical and full, and his hands were small. He would have formed, in fact, an excellent model for a sculptor, and, by simply changing his expression—nothing more—a most beautiful and poetical portrait might have been made of him. It was, however, just his expression which spoiled him. He had got, somehow, the wrong one, and so an incongruous and uncomfortable effect was produced. There are a great many young men like him in this respect. Nature intended them for one expression, and they have gone astray, and so got another which does not fit. Later on in life it does not matter; because the manner of life which gives the expression also changes the features. Now, in the case of this young gentleman, the nobility of purpose, the resolution of virtue, the courage of principle which should have appeared naturally on his face were not there.

Virtuous resolution and high moral principle are not always necessary qualifications for making a young man popular. There were many men much beloved in Ferrier's regiment who were not implacably virtuous; yet Ferrier himself was a man with no friends; he was perfectly well bred; he was not insolent, he was not boisterous, or loud, or contemptuous, or superior, or any of the things which generally make men unpopular. Yet he was not liked. Many reasons might be assigned to explain this fact: one will be quite sufficient—the young man not only thought of no one but himself, but did not pretend, as many quite selfish men do, to think about anybody. He was thoroughly held and possessed by the love of self. He had but one god—the soul within him which continually craved for something new, something which it could devour, something which would keep it in excitement. Now the man who desires not before all other things, but to the exclusion of all other things his own personal gratification, is always in the long run, if it comes in his way, mainly attracted by gambling. There is a fierce excitement in it; there is the rapid acquisition of money—the possession of which means venal pleasure of all kinds; there is the trampling on other people in order to get it; there are the alternations of fear and hope; no one else is benefited by your success; no one else desires it; every man is wholly for himself; there is but one prize, and all desire it; to make one man happy, the rest must be disappointed. Therefore, though there are many pursuits in which the egoist may gratify his favourite passion, there is none so entirely absorbing and so satisfying as gambling.

A man at eight-and-twenty ought, even in colonial garrison life, to have some other pursuits. Ferrier found none which gave him any pleasure. He played continually: he would have played all day; he was ready to play all night. The pleasing result, so far, was a quagmire of debts and obligations out of which the way would have been dubious even to a rich man. Now the House of Ferrier had never been rich. Lord Ferrier was not rich as a country gentleman; as a peer he was certainly poor. And at all times there was present to his heir the vision of those debts and the anxiety how they were to be paid.

This morning he awoke raspy in his temper, as often happens when men sit up till two in the morning to play écarté and drink too much soda-and-brandy. And, he remembered that the Major had taken another I O U from him when they parted. And, in addition, he found that his groom had let down his horse and cut his knees. It was small satisfaction, yet some relief, to kick and cuff the fellow; and when this was done there was still the recollection of that I O U.

"A bad night, Ferrier," said the Major, looking at the little slip of paper in his pocket-book. "This makes thirteen hundred and fifty-five, I think."

Ferrier received the hint in silence.

"If I were you, my boy," continued the Major, "I would drop play for a while, just to let luck come round a bit."

"Luck!" the loser groaned. "There never was such luck as mine."

"I don't think, Ferrier, that I ought to play with you; it isn't fair. I keep my head; you lose yours. I'm an old hand, and you are a young one. I play for the game; you play for the stakes."

"Hang it, man! You can't mean that you don't play to win?"

"Of course I play to win. Every man does. But I think of the game, and you think only of the points. See?"

Ferrier threw himself into one of the long chairs and relapsed into a gloomy silence. The New Year had begun badly, indeed, for him. It was going to finish—but this, as yet, he knew not—worse. The Major strolled out with an umbrella, and then there were left on the verandah only the Professor and Ferrier. Presently the Professor dropped his French novel, and, lazily swinging in the hammock, contemplated the moody young gentleman with wonder and pity.

"It seems to me," he said to himself after a while, "that here is a young man whose conscience is pegging away at him like the eagle at the man on the rock. I wonder what he has done. To think that Virginie should have a cousin with such a face."

Indeed, at the moment the face was suffused with such a glow of vindictive wrath, self-reproach, and hatred, that it was quite horrible and terrifying to look upon.

"I wonder who it is, and what he has done; though, perhaps, it is a person of the other sex," said the Professor. "But it may be, perchance, that the Honourable Guy is possessed of a devil or two."

Towards nine o'clock, the sun being high and the heat of the day fairly begun, the men began to come back, and when the Secretary appeared leading the discomfited Padre, with his beautiful skirts cut into ribbons like a banana-leaf after a hurricane, and his black trousers rent in a hundred places, there arose a shout of admiration and joy quite beautiful to hear. And then they all went to bathe.

Tom, who was the last to return, having been the round of the whole estate and made notes of shortcomings, led the way. He knew the pool where water was coolest; it was half a mile off, where the ravine was the deepest and the narrowest. And he knew the shortest way to it, which was straight down a perpendicular rock about ninety feet deep; but, as he went down there every morning, it never occurred to him that any-

body should think of breaking his neck there, and he was greatly surprised when half-way down to see above him the Padre clinging to the rock like a spread-eagle, unable to move up or down. Presently, the united efforts of the party got him up, and the Professor undertook to lead him to the pool by a safer and more circuitous route.

Oh! the pools and ladders, and waterfalls and brawling mountain-streams of Palmiste! Oh! to sit under a little cascade of four or five feet high, to let the cold water flow over the hot and weary limbs, is a joy which we who shiver in cold latitudes cannot understand or even conceive. It belongs almost to the keen and passionate joys; it is one which never palls, of which one is never satiated, the desire for which recurs every morning. "But," said the Professor, "I prefer the long way round."

The bath and the walk home, and the dressing which followed, brought them well on to eleven, which, as everybody knows, is the breakfast hour of the Palmiste planter. Eleven o'clock in the forenoon is, in fact, the proper time, the natural time, for eating. We foolish folk of England have abolished breakfast and substituted luncheon, a meal which spoils the day, depraves the appetite, and ruins the dinner. Nature intended mankind to eat twice in the day, and each time after the fatigue of labour. At eleven, if one gets up at five or thereabouts, the day's work is well nigh done. After six hours in the saddle among the canes, for instance, as Tom did, one gets home with a hunger almost unintelligible in these climes; a hunger which to a London Alderman would make life indeed worth having. With what a cordial will that breakfast was attacked by the guests; how claret flowed without stint or stay down thirsty throats; how, after the simple bourgeois plenty of *bouillabaisse*, fish fried, fish boiled, chicken and salad, cutlets, grilled turkey, and devilled bones, a stately prawn curry added nobility to the repast; how coffee was followed by a *chasse*; how Tom distinguished himself beyond and above his peers; how the Pink Boy contemplated the thing with rapturous wonder; and how the Padre thought with something like shame of the plain English rasher and the cup of tea,—these are things which may be briefly indicated, not dwelt upon. Envy is a hateful passion, and one must always consider the weaker brethren.

After breakfast there was a rest. Most of them went back to the Pavilion for cigars. The Padre, fatigued with the morning's scramble, and perhaps just touched with the unaccustomed wine, fell fast asleep. Only Captain Ferrier remained with the ladies. He had shaken off his moody fit, and was now, having taken a great deal of claret, thoroughly set up and revived. Virginie had a great many questions to ask, and the two ladies sat and listened in their soft and dreamy manner. They talked about England; and the child wanted to know all about her cousins and the noble Head of the House; what the castle was like; what they all did when they were at home in it; what the place was like, and what the people. Her cousin tried to describe them all. But what can a girl understand who knows no winter, no fog, no snow, no east winds, no green enclosures, no English villages, and no old English churches standing amid the graves of all the generations, girt with the old trees?

Meantime, Tom, who knew not the meaning of fatigue, though he had been five hours in the saddle, and had eaten a more enormous breakfast than any of the rest, was busied with what appeared to be a net. At sight of that net the Professor arose, and softly retired to hide himself in the tool-house with his novel. Tom unrolled his net, examined the meshes, mended one or two places, then rolled it up again. This took half an hour or so. Then he called a boy, and gave it him with a few directions. Then he rubbed his hands, and announced, with a cheerful smile, that everything was ready, and they could start as soon as they pleased.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUNTING OF THE GOURAMI.

"Let us first," said the Secretary, the only one who had been taking any part in the preparations, "wake up the Padre. He, too, must go with us."

He was awakened with some difficulty, and at first exhibited temper, and refused to join the expedition. However, he was young, and not to go might seem like showing a white feather unworthy of an Oxford athlete.

Besides, the sport was the gentle and harmless one of angling. Therefore the poor innocent, though with misgiving, put on his broad felt hat and once more adjusted his white muslin puggrey and was ready.

When the Professor had been led forth by the car from

his hiding-place and had been told that he, too, must go, and that resistance would be unavailing, the party was complete, the only man left behind being Ferrier, who had no taste for sport of any kind outside an English preserve. He suggested that the Major should stay behind with him and while away the heat of the day with a little *écarté*, or *vingt-un* for two—a very pleasing method of losing money. But the Major refused, and went off with the rest.

First marched Tom, important, because he was the leader or captain of the *chasse aux gouramis*. Next came the Indian boys, carrying the gear; then followed, with a rueful countenance, the captive Professor, grimly remembering fatigues on a certain occasion a year ago, and devoutly wishing that the sport was over; after him the Padre, the long skirts of his only clerical coat left him flapping about his legs, and his white puggrey streaming behind the broad black hat; and then the Assistant Colonial Secretary, with a sweet smile upon him as he contemplated that broad hat and those flapping skirts, and thought of what awaited the owner of those garments. It was the hottest time in the year; in the shade the thermometer would be about ninety; in the sun, anything you please. Yet there was a gentle breeze or stir in the air from the south, whence cometh the breath of the Antarctic, warmed upon its way, yet cool still, and fresh, when it floats across the hot and tropical twenties.

"In the ravine," said the Professor, in order to encourage the Padre, "there will be no breeze at all; the rocks catch the heat and hold it till strangers come; then they give it out, and the stranger is as grateful as you will be presently. It will be like the hot room in the Turkish bath—that room, I mean, where, if you want breakfast, you take the materials in raw and hold them in your hand till they are cooked. Last year we brought some tiffin with us—eggs, you know, and bread, and some slices of ham; we put them on a stone just for a few minutes while we went into a pool after the gouramis. When we came back the eggs were hard boiled, the bread was toast, and the rashers of bacon were done to a turn."

"I wish," said the Padre, "that I had left my waistcoat at home."

"If you had been well advised," said the Professor, whose only fault was a want of reverence for sacred things, "you would have come on this expedition in your surplice, and nothing else."

Presently they came to the break-neck way down the cliff, down which they all scrambled except these two, and they went ignominiously round by a longer and safer way. "What boots it," asked the Professor, "to save ten minutes if you break your neck?"

When they joined the party, the Padre observed, with surprise, that they were all undressing. Further, that the Professor, with a sigh, also began to shed his garments, and that he himself was expected to do the same thing. He realised the meaning of the irreverent suggestion about his surplice when he received a little maillot of coloured cotton, such as Frenchmen use to swim in. And he began almost to wish that he had not joined the expedition. In a few minutes the whole party were arrayed in this primitive dress, in which and their helmets and hats, and nothing else, they began walking along the hot boulders, under and among which the stream was brawling on her way.

The streams of Palmiste are all alike: they rise in the hills and they run into the sea, through ravines beneficently provided by Nature for the purpose. If there were no ravines, they would have to tumble, in break-neck fashion, over precipices. As it is, they gracefully roll, run, leap, babble, roar, prattle, fall, hasten, or linger on their way, through most beautiful valleys, sometimes deep, sometimes shallow; sometimes broad, sometimes narrow; sometimes with perpendicular faces of rock, and sometimes with sloping sides, clothed with hanging wood. Sometimes the bottom of the ravine consists of great rounded boulders, and one has to get along by jumping from one to the other. At first, this is fatiguing, until you get into the swing of it. Sometimes there is a broad flat bottom, covered over and piled with boulders; sometimes the ravine closes quite in, and the stream runs noisily between the rocky walls of a narrow way; sometimes the water dashes over the stones, forming hundreds of tiny cascades; sometimes it glides under them, and is invisible for half a mile or so, though the dense growth on either hand speaks of the water below; sometimes it widens out and forms ladders, pools, or basins; and sometimes it leaps over a cliff and becomes a waterfall, dazzling, feathery, like diamond spray. And everywhere, except on the face of the rock, trees: such trees as one may dream of; palms of every kind—the date palm, the cocoa, the raphia, the travellers' tree, the aloe with its long mast, the fragrant acacia, the tamarind, and a hundred others, whose names one knows not. In the shade under the trees and hidden behind the rocks are ferns, such as one may not hope to see in any other country, and on the branches of the trees are orchids for those who have eyes to see and knowledge to understand.

The ravine on that hot January day was very silent, winding in and out, growing deeper as it approached the sea. A few bo's'n birds called to each other flying across from rock to rock; you could hear, perhaps, the chatter of monkeys in the trees. But there was no other sound. The place is so far away from the steps of man that a visitor who should chance to slip and fall

might lie there until he died, and long after, without being found. For many miles of its course no one ever goes there, except at rare intervals, when Tom brings his friends to fish for gourami, or when he strolls down in the afternoon with a gun on the chance of a shot. The coolies, an incurious folk, have no occasion to go there; the negroes are afraid of ghosts; and, of course, no one except an Englishman would venture into those hot and stifling depths at high noon of the New Year, with the sun straight over head glaring into all kinds of nooks and crannies where, save at such seasons of vertical advantage, ray of sun can never enter. The men were barefooted, and presently the Padre began to understand the Professor's allegory of the hard-boiled eggs. He was very hot, in spite of his scanty apparel; he asked himself, with shame, what certain people at home, who thought greatly of his missionary zeal, would say if they saw him now; he was tired with the early morning walk; his feet were blistering; his legs ached with the perpetual leaping from stone to stone; his shins were bruised with frequent falls.

Said the Professor, softly,

"Last year, a man came here who was unaccustomed to walking on red-hot stones. We carried him up again after a while, but he has never recovered the use of his feet, and now goes on crutches."

Then he was silent, and the Padre began to think there might be some truth in it.

But their leader called a halt, and everybody, while the preparations were being made, sat down with their feet in the water.

They were arrived at a most beautiful pool, about forty feet long and twenty broad. Great trees hung over the water, and splendid *lianes*, with stems as thick as the trunk of a good-sized English oak, spread out long arms, octopus fashion, to throttle and destroy the trees which they embraced. They began—those who understood the method—by lowering the net carefully into the water at the upper end. When all was ready, the Professor, with a groan, took up his position in the middle, while Tom placed himself at one end and the Secretary at the other. These three were places of honour assigned to those who were most at ease in the water, and presently they were all swimming slowly down the pool, joined by the others. It was a sweet and a beautiful sight to see the spectacles of the Professor glittering under his helmet, as he went through the task, without enthusiasm, yet conscientiously; and the broad hat of his Reverence shading an anxious face, because he was not happy about his feet, and because the proceedings seemed to lack the dignity proper to the cloth; and the red face of the Major and the delight of the Pink Boy in the coolness of the water. Presently Tom handed over his end of the net to the McAndrew and disappeared. After remaining under the water for about five-and-twenty minutes or so, during which time he was adjusting the net at the bottom, he came up again. At this point the Professor, catching sight of the Padre's nose just out of the water, under the shade of his beautiful broad hat, began to laugh silently, and communicated a shivering to the net, so that Tom thought it was one of the eels, in length from ten to forty feet, for which the rivers of Palmiste are so famous, and went down again to investigate.

By slow degrees and with great care the net was hauled along the whole pool and pulled in at the end. Then Tom's responsibilities began again. For he now had to dive down and bring up the fish, taking only as many as they wanted and picking out the big ones, throwing the young fish back again into the pool. Meantime, those who were not actively employed sat on the edge of the pool with their feet in the water and waited. It was a good haul; but Tom said that they must have one more cast of the net, and that the next likely pool was not more than a quarter of a mile down the stream. He set off, leading the way, as before. The rest followed meekly, with the exception of the Professor, who beckoned the Padre and made a gesture of silence.

When the procession had disappeared beyond the next bend of the rocks, he rose and asked his Reverence if he wished to play that game any more.

"I—I—certainly think that we have had enough."

"Then come back with me. We will put on our clothes and we will go cameron-fishing instead."

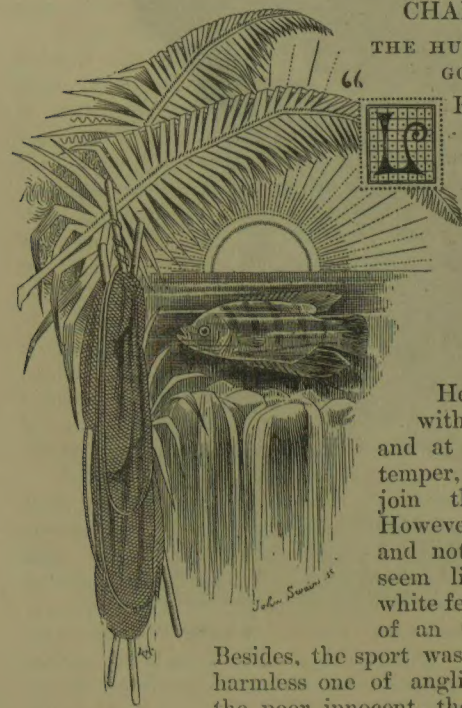
"Have we not had enough fishing for one day?" The Padre thought of those awful stones and of his blistered feet, and remembered the cool verandah.

The Professor hastened to explain.

"We shall not take off our clothes for cameron-fishing; nor shall we jump about on red-hot boulders; and we shan't walk at all. It is a lazy sport. We shall sit under the shadiest place we can find, higher up, where there is a little air. I will teach you how to fish. I never catch any myself, but I know the way other people catch them; and perhaps you will be more lucky."

"All this seems a dreadful waste of time, does it not?" asked the man fresh from Oxford.

"You have only been a month in Palmiste," said the Professor. "After a little, you will discover that you can't waste time here. There's no such thing as wasting time, unless, indeed, you throw it away on reading. Out here we are irresponsible. Life goes by, I suppose, because there is a cemetery; but you don't feel as if it was ever going to end. There is no use trying to do any work. Nobody will ever be improved; nobody wants to be improved. It is warm and sunny—what more can a man want?"





MONTBARD, DEL.

B. LOUMAN, SC.

THE SIGNAL MOUNTAIN.

"If I thought that," said the Padre, "I would go straight back to England and find Work. Why, it was because I thought I should find my Work here that I came."

The Professor smiled. "That is the language of the schools. I know it."

"Would you have me," asked the young clergyman hotly, "would you have me take this post in order to sit down in shady places and catch—what do you call them?"

"Wise men sit down and meditate," said the Professor. "Talk to the Squire; he never reads much, yet he is as wise as Solomon. Restless men buzz about, and shove, and push, and call it work. Do you know the story in Rabelais about the work of Diogenes?"

"I do not read Rabelais," said his Reverence, coldly.

"Poor man! Never mind. There was a civil Chaplain here until lately who was a miracle of laziness. Yet he always went on talking about his Work, with a capital W, you know, just as you do. It is very good to begin with, and the habit remains."

"I hope the habit will remain."

"It will. It will. But the thing will vanish. I am going home myself before long, because I am one of the restless men, and want to work. It is very foolish of me, and I am sure I ought rather to stay. Never mind. Let us go catch the cameron. Then we will find our way home and sit on the verandah till it is time to dress for dinner, and eat letchees and talk to Virginie. I have known her ever since I came here, which is now four years ago; and I am in love with her, as you will be before long—very likely you are already—you need not blush, because it does you credit—and I am deuced sorry she has got that fellow for a cousin."

"Why?" asked the Padre.

"Why? Because—because I do not like him."

They had their cameron-fishing. The Professor led the way to a quiet little stream above the ravine, where there was shade. Here he cut a long thin branch of a willow-like

tree and tied to the end of it a running noose, made of the thin and strong tendril of the *liane*. "Now," he said, "you do likewise. Go and sit on that stone, there, and I will sit there. All you have to do is to keep quiet. When you see a cameron marching along, pit-a-pat, suspecting nothing, hook your noose over his tail. Then nip him up, and he is caught. It is quite easy to do it, though I have never been able, with all my efforts, to catch a single one."

"What is a cameron like, when you do see him?"

"He is about six inches long, and he is black, and he looks like a crayfish, or big prawn. He is good enough to boil a beautiful red, and he lends himself to curry, or you can eat him boiled. He isn't proud. Now, go and catch him."

The Professor was short-sighted, consequently he never saw any camérons at all. But he sat very patiently, with his noose in the water and the camérons playing about the harmless trap in dozens; and he meditated.

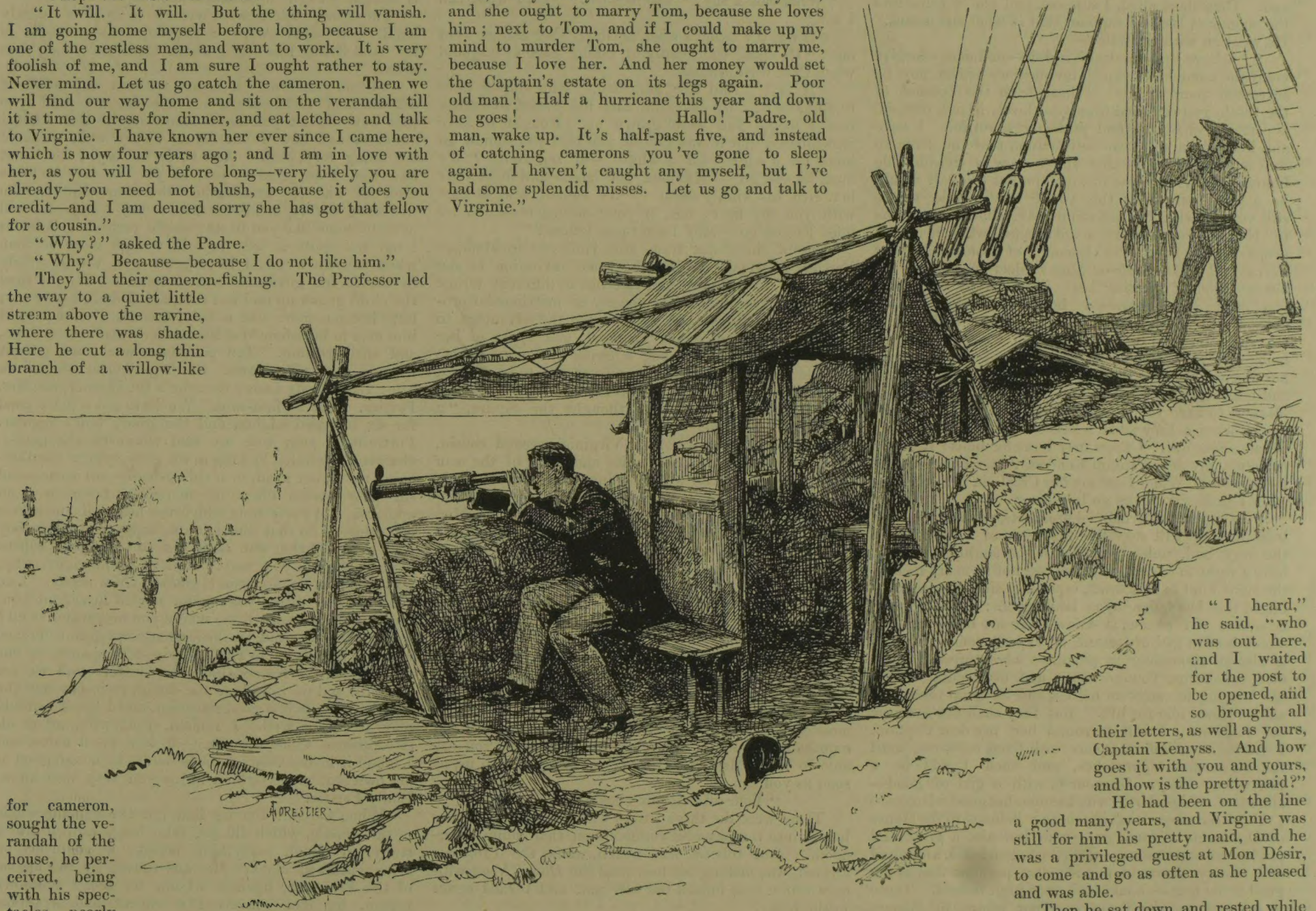
"She will be a great heiress"—this was the staple of his reflections—"that cousin of hers will be a Lord, very likely he will want to marry her; and she ought to marry Tom, because she loves him; next to Tom, and if I could make up my mind to murder Tom, she ought to marry me, because I love her. And her money would set the Captain's estate on its legs again. Poor old man! Half a hurricane this year and down he goes! . . . Hallo! Padre, old man, wake up. It's half-past five, and instead of catching camérons you've gone to sleep again. I haven't caught any myself, but I've had some splendid misses. Let us go and talk to Virginie."

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE MAIL CAME IN.

This New-Year's Day was considered by the Mon Désir party as in no way differing from any other New-Year's Day. As usual, there was open house so far as the resources of the establishment allowed: so many beds, so many sofas, so many mattresses, so many guests. They came; they feasted, talked, sang, and rejoiced; there was abundance of talk, with the popping of corks innumerable; there was the prettiest girl in the whole island to court, compliment, and tease. When the brief holiday was over they all went away again to their respective work. That is what happened every New-Year's Day. All things in Palmiste go on as if they were to last for ever, or to recur for ever on the usual day. And certainly no one could have suspected that a time so festive, gay, and irresponsible, would bring with it the cause of a revolution—nothing short of a revolution—for the lives of half the people in the party.

When the Professor, after the fruitless hunt



for cameron, sought the verandah of the house, he perceived, being with his spectacles nearly as good as other people without, that something had happened or was about to happen.

First of all, the English mail was in, and there was present the Captain of the mail himself, who had just come out, and was sitting in great contentment in one of the easiest of the chairs. The Squire, whose face was troubled, was holding a letter in one hand and the *Home News* in the other. First he read the letter through, then he read a page or two of the newspaper, then he turned to the letter again, and then he went back to the paper; evidently he was thinking more of the letter than of the printed page. The two elder ladies sat with tears in their eyes, holding each a hand of Virginie, who stood before them, pale and troubled, as if she was going to be offered up in sacrifice. What could be the matter? Captain Ferrier stood apart, with a small packet of open letters in his hand, occupied with his own thoughts, and they seemed as gloomy as those which had distorted his features in the early morning.

Something was certainly going to happen. As a rule, the excitement of the mail lasts from the first appearance of the signals on the Signal-hill until the issue of the slip into which the news of the whole month is condensed by the Editor of the *Commercial Gazette*. This summary, which is all that anyone wants to see, varies in length from four inches to six inches and a half. Think of getting your news for a whole month condensed into six inches of letterpress! All the great people in the world, the Bismarcks, and the Gladstones, and the Gambettas; all the ministers, statesmen, generals, Parliament men, eloquent speakers, persuasive preachers, convincing writers, mischievous

demagogues, restless agitators, misleading-article men, poets, prigs, dramatists, historians, novelists, actors, artists, Big Rag, Little Tag, and Bobtail—all over the habitable globe toil and moil with the utmost diligence for four weeks in every human tongue, and the result of the whole can be boiled down into a six-inch slip! And even that does not prove that the world has been advanced by one sixth of the length of that slip. The monthly spectacle of a whole world feverishly busy, and doing nothing, is of itself, without considering the climate, sufficient to account for the philosophic calm and resolute inaction of the Palmiste natives. "Why all this care?" they say. "Nothing comes of it. Only sometimes knocking of heads together; tumblers, broken bones, revolutions, and wars, with loss of property and triumph of the wrong side. Sit down, neighbours, and let us tell each other pleasant stories, and make merry while we may, until the night falls, when we are fain to go to sleep."

The perusal of the slip finished, the excitement instantly dies away. Everybody reads the same papers, the *Overland Mail*, the *Home News*, and the *Illustrated London News*; some go so far as to read the *Saturday Review* and *Punch*, or the *Spectator*. But they are few; therefore, since no one can boast of any information but that which is open to his neighbours, there is no inducement to talk politics; and since no more information can come for a whole month, there is no inducement to speculate.

The captain of the mail-steamer arrived, then, about four of the clock, bringing with him the monthly packet of letters and papers for the whole party.

"I heard," he said, "who was out here, and I waited for the post to be opened, and so brought all

their letters, as well as yours, Captain Kemyss. And how goes it with you and yours, and how is the pretty maid?"

He had been on the line a good many years, and Virginie was still for him his pretty maid, and he was a privileged guest at Mon Désir, to come and go as often as he pleased and was able.

Then he sat down and rested while the letters were read.

There were two for Captain Kemyss—his correspondence with the mother country, after so many years of exile, had dropped by degrees, and was now almost reduced to nothing; one for Madame Ferrier—a very unusual circumstance; one for Virginie, who had never had a letter from England before; five or six for Captain Ferrier; two for the Professor; half a dozen for the Padre; a pile for the others; and a vast quantity of newspapers, *Punches*, monthly magazines, books and pamphlets for everybody.

The first of the two letters which Captain Kemyss opened was from a certain cousin of his, a country gentleman of the Midland counties, and was respecting Tom. "My advice," said the writer, "is to keep the boy where he is. Let him stick to the thing that he knows. As for sugar-planting being precarious, it has kept you for thirty years, and I dare say it will keep him. England is not a good country just now, especially for men like me, who have a dozen farms on their hands;" and so on—and so on—a letter which does not concern us.

Captain Kemyss laid it down with a sigh. He had hoped that perhaps some chance might have been found for Tom when the crash, so long imminent, should come at last. Then he took up the other letter, which was in a writing strange to him. When, now a dozen years and more ago, his guardianship of Virginie began, there was a second guardian, also one of Captain Ferrier's brother officers, who had sold out and was then living at Southsea. It was understood that he was to hold an honorary office, and that the child would continue to live with her mother at Mon Désir, while

Captain Kemyss managed her estate. So honorary was the office that the acting guardian had almost forgotten the existence of his coadjutor, and had not even learned that he was dead.

The letter was from his widow, and was as follows:—

"Dear Sir,—

"As the widow of your old friend and brother officer, one who was associated with you in the office of guardian to Miss Ferrier, I trust I need no introduction or excuse for addressing you."—"So Jack is dead, is he," said the reader, stopping to look at the signature. "Poor Jack! I had almost forgotten him."—"Circumstances have not allowed me, until lately, to offer any hospitality to my ward, if I may call her so. I am now, however, I rejoice to say, at last in a position to discharge one at least of the duties accepted for me by my late husband."—"He married—I heard that he married—I forget who she was," said the Squire, stopping again at this point to recall things, "somebody of good family, I know—and she had expectations. Let me see. They were hard up when I heard last—lived in a cottage at Southsea; that must have been twelve years ago. Then Jack died, I suppose, and she's come into the money at last. I suppose that is what she means." He went on with the letter—

"I believe that our dear Virginie—or Lucie—forgive me if the name has escaped my memory—must now be seventeen years of age. I hear from the Colonel, of the 180th, just returned from your lovely island, that she is perfectly charming and perfectly beautiful. I have also learned, to my great satisfaction, that you have so well nursed her estate that she is now a considerable heiress. Now, my dear Sir, do you not think it would be a great pity that this young lady, while she is still young, with her affections free, should not come to England and make acquaintance with her own people? I have the honour of knowing Miss Ferrier. I was talking on this subject to her on the last occasion of meeting her. I am happy to inform you that she expressed herself in the kindest manner concerning her unknown cousin, and will, I am sure, show her all the attention when she comes home that she can desire or expect. As for me, I do not disguise the fact that I should like to have a young and beautiful girl staying with me, partly because it is pleasant to have young and pretty faces about one, and partly because they make a house attractive and bring people about one. Others may hunt for lions; it is my principle, my dear Captain Kemyss, that men care more for lionesses. When I get my fair Creole in my drawing-room I shall not let her go in a hurry.

"As regards matrimonial prospects, you may entirely trust me. I will stop the first sign of a flirtation in the very bud, unless the man is thoroughly what you have a right to expect. There are not so many men of the right kind in this town, especially since the terrible blight that has fallen upon landowners; yet there may be some. Of course, I know there are many dangers which beset a girl of fortune or expectations. London is always abounding in penniless adventurers, literary men, subalterns, younger sons, and even curates, who are longing to marry an heiress and hang up their hats and sit down idle for life. But they shall not get near our Virginie. I will surround her, my dear Captain. I will be like a hollow square with fixed bayonets, until the right man approaches, and then I will be a benevolent Fairy. Of course, with a girl of good—almost of noble—birth, who has none but good relatives—I think I have heard that her mother belongs to the House of Desmarests d'Auvergne—who has also a great and productivesugar estate—with, the Colonel said, a hundred and twenty thousand pounds, but perhaps that is too good to be true—should look very high indeed. There is nothing to which she may not aspire to, though if we dream of a coronet we should be sober; our thoughts ought not to run higher than an earl or a viscount. However, I will do my best. Character, of course, as well as position, should be carefully inquired into.

"I have written honestly to you, because if you were really a private friend of my late husband you must be a man of the world. I frankly think that my offer is a good one, and that in the interests of the girl you ought not to refuse it. If her mother lives, my invitation will extend to her; but, on the whole, I sincerely think it will be better that the child should come alone, and acquire, by living entirely among English people, the ideas, the air, and the tone of English society.

"I hope to have a favourable answer by return mail. I am ready to receive my charge to-morrow, if she can come. If a chaperon can be found, the arrival of my ward in person would be the most favourable reply possible.

"I remain, dear Captain Kemyss,

"Yours, very sincerely,

"LAURA HALLOWES."

The Squire read this frank and plain-spoken letter through twice. The tone of it struck his ears, long unfamiliar with the world of fashion, discordantly. His ward was to go to London, and stand in the matrimonial market with other girls, saying, "Behold me! I am rich, beautiful, young, of gentle birth. I will take a coronet in exchange for myself." Yet the letter was honest; also, the invitation was one which ought not to be lightly refused. It was right that the girl should go to England; it was part of her education. She ought, as Mrs. Hallows suggested, to make the acquaintance

of her own people; she ought to go while yet young, with her affections free. And at this point, he said, with a sigh, "Poor Tom!" and read the letter again. Evidently the letter of a woman of society—of the world; and probably a woman who would make social capital out of her rich young heiress. Yet, what harm would that do Virginie?

At this point he folded the letter and raised his eyes. A singular pantomime was going on.

First, his own wife took a letter from Madame Ferrier's hands, and read it. Then both ladies and Virginie gazed upon each other in a kind of stupor. Then Madame Ferrier held out her arms, and the girl fell into her maternal embrace.

"Child," murmured the mother, "Can I let thee go? So soon? So soon?"

"Sybille," said her friend, speaking the language of her youth, "we must let her go. It is for the child's own good; we are two simple Creole ladies, who have never left the island and never shall. But Virginie has English cousins; she must visit her father's country, she should learn to love his home. Virginie, child of my heart, what sayest thou?"

"What can I say?" she replied. "Oh! what can I say?"

"It was thy father's wish, my dear," her mother went on. "He spoke continually of taking thee to England when thou wast grandchild."

"It is I," said her guardian, "who should have thought of it. My dear, the time has passed so swiftly that I forgot you were grown up. I ought to have remembered that it was due to you that you should go home for a while—for a while"—he repeated. "We must let you go." He took her hands and bent over her with his kindly smile. "We cannot bear to part with you, my dear; but, if your mother consents, we must let you go. May I see those letters?"

One of them was from Mrs. Hallows to Madame Ferrier, conveying to her the same invitation as she had made to Captain Kemyss, but in different terms. For she said nothing about society or matrimonial projects and ambitions; but dwelt upon the advantage to the young lady of seeing England, and spoke of her own as a quiet home among a circle of quiet friends; and she also dwelt upon the advantages to be derived in the way of music, art, and so forth.

"She must be, indeed," thought the Squire, "a woman of the world."

The other letter was from Virginie's second cousin, Maude, daughter of Lord Ferrier and sister of the man on the verandah, who was scowling over his letters. It was a very short letter, but kindly:—

"Dear Cousin," she wrote, "I learn from Mrs. Hallows, the widow of one of your guardians, that she has invited you to pay a visit to England next year. I sincerely hope that your mother may let you come, even if she does not herself accompany you. Remember that you have cousins who would like to make your acquaintance.

"Your father was at school with mine, his first cousin. I have heard a great deal about you and your beautiful country home already from my brother, and I assure you that I look forward to making your acquaintance with a very great deal of pleasure. We spend most of our time at The Towers, but generally have two months in London. Wherever we are, when you are able to leave Mrs. Hallows, come and stay with us, as soon as you can.

"Your affectionate cousin, MAUDE."

These were the three letters which fell like so many bombs into the peaceful verandah on that sunny afternoon. And this it was which, when the Professor arrived, was making his host read the *Home News* with eyes which read indeed but saw not, and turned again to the letter.

"A Coronet," he murmured; "but why not? Poor Tom! Yet, would it have been right—would it have been honest—to take advantage of her innocence and ignorance before she knows the world? Let her go. And Tom must take his chance. A poor chance, indeed! Rank against rusticity. Fashion against fidelity; the lover of the town against the sweetheart of the country."

Virginie's cousin, meanwhile, had opened two letters. One of them was from his sister. He read it hurriedly, and crammed it into his pocket as if it made him angry. What it said was this:—

"Dearest Guy,—I hear from two or three people who know, or ought to know, that our Creole cousin is rich, young, and beautiful. Also that she has manners, which would fit her for any station. And that she is coming home to stay with a woman who wants her, I believe, as a help to get on in society. The woman, however, is very well, and will take the girl to good houses. I have taken notice of her for your sake—mind, for your sake—and because such a woman may, in certain cases, be very useful to you. Now, Guy, be reasonable. You tell me that you are in desperate straits. It is now six years, or thereabouts, since these desperate straits began. I do not reproach you; but I remind you that you have had, not only your own allowance, but all my money, and all that I could persuade my father to add. He does not know of these straits; if he did he would ask you how they are caused. I do know, Guy. Again, I do not reproach you. I will even go on trying to help you, though I know that every ten-pound note we get for you will only go the same way as

its predecessor. Now, consider carefully. When you were at home last summer I caught an heiress and got her here on purpose for you to meet her. You remember her. She was not, I own, in the least degree beautiful; nor was she clever at all; and I did not expect that you would fall in love with her; but she was rich and she was amiable, and she was ready to fall in love with you. And men in desperate straits cannot always marry anybody they please. But you would not have her, although you were in such straits. Now, here is this other girl. Come home immediately, on urgent private affairs. Come home, if you can, in the same steamer with her; make fierce love to her all the way home; when she goes to Mrs. Hallows', let it be with your engaged ring on her finger. When you get her money you can pay off your creditors, even if you only begin a fresh course of madness. There, Guy; that is all I can do for you at present. I have only to add that the times are bad for everybody who has got land, and therefore for us. And it is not the least use expecting any further assistance from your father, or from your affectionate sister, MAUDE."

"Then," murmured the young man, "how the devil is Morgan's I O U to be taken up?"

The other letter was written in a less clerical hand, and there were occasional mis-spellings in it. And it was this letter which made the young man scowl.

"I told you, Guy," it began, without any polite or conventional endearments of speech; "I told you that I would let you know from time to time what I am doing and how I am doing. Very well, then. I am doing very well. And so is the boy. He is not like you, I am glad to say, as yet; in face he takes after me and his grandfather, the scene-shifter, who was once a very handsome man; and I hope he will never become like you in any single respect. And, as I am not quite a lady myself, though more so than when you knew me, I have got a girl who is a lady to act as his governess and companion. By the time the child grows up and can compare, I shall, I dare say, have become more like a lady, because I do not want him ever to be ashamed of his mother. An actress I am, and shall remain. Ten pounds a week, my gallant Captain, your wife draws. She's got her marriage lines safe; but nobody knows that she's the Honourable Mrs. Ferrier. Biz is first-rate. We have got a piece good for six hundred nights, and the ghost walks regular. Portraits of your wife are sold wherever she goes—character-portraits, looking in the glass, tying a handkerchief round her head, in a riding-habit—all sorts—and she gets letters, offers of marriage, bouquets, and applause, and everything which the heart of an actress can desire. So that she is quite happy. And the boy is so beautiful that she does not so very much repent having fallen in your way. And, as for his rights, why, whatever you do, you can't gamble them away. I do not want ever to see you again, nor to hear from you. The Army List will tell me where you are, which is all I want to know. And, on the least attempt at interference with my boy, we go to The Towers—accompanied by our own people, the respectable scene-shifter—and we see my lord, and we introduce the daughter-in-law and the grandchild. It is a good situation, and I think I should play it rather well. I remain, your wife, not at all affectionate, Violet Lovelace—it is a swell name, and I found it in the Court Guide—but it is not so good as my own real name, which is, as you very well know, Emily Ferrier."

When Captain Ferrier had got through the whole of this epistle, which did not take long, he fell into a study, in which everything became a nocturne, an arrangement in black. He was roused by the arrival of the Professor, against whom, for some unknown reason, he had conceived a violent and irrational hatred. He glared at him for a moment, and then strode hastily away. First he walked along the avenue of palms, and when he got to the end of it he swore aloud; then, by way of distraction, he went to the stable to look at his horse, and swore again, and if his syce had been in the place it would have been bad for that poor Indian. But he was not. The man was at the moment with the old witch of Endor bargaining for a charm which should slowly poison a horse, so that no one would suspect what was the matter with him, and an honest groom should not get into trouble. The terms of the transaction were amicably arranged, and the charm, which was to take the form of a little something to pour among the oats, was promised, on condition that this estimable person should pay for it beforehand—because he could write—in forged passes, by means of which the old woman afterwards made much money and helped many of her friends to deceive the police.

We may here observe that, among the many things which once done cannot be recalled, perhaps the most fatal is such a thing as Guy Ferrier did when he was just twenty-one years of age, being then a young gentleman of very headstrong disposition, and fully determined upon having all he wanted, at any cost. He had always from childhood acted upon this principle, and it made him so popular at school, that when he left the boys proposed to have fireworks. In the Army he continued to act on the same settled principle, being now quite certain that he deserved to have all he wanted; and he was so much beloved, therefore, that when it became known, directly after the arrival of this mail, that Ferrier was going home on urgent private affairs—

presumably the raising of money to pay his debts of honour—his brother officers so far sympathised with him as to give thanks unanimously that he was going to enjoy a holiday. It was upon this principle, also, being at the moment consumed and inflamed with passion, that, at the age of twenty-one, he entered secretly into the bonds of holy wedlock with a certain "young person" named Emily Hicks. She was quite young, extremely pretty, quick, and clever, well able to take care of herself, almost uneducated, the daughter of a scene-shifter or carpenter and "general service" theatrical man, and she was just commencing a dramatic career, which now promises to be distinctly successful, when this thing happened to her.

The interruption to her professional pursuits lasted rather more than a year. She then returned to Daddy Perigal, and informed him that for the future she should never again speak to her husband, nor take money from him, nor in any way own him; that she should go back to the stage in her first-assumed name; but, for the sake of the child, whom she brought with her, whose rights must be watched, she would assume her legal name when the boy should be grown up. She therefore returned to the stage under her old acting name, and began to work just as hard as if she were still really Emily Hicks, with her future before her, instead of the Hon. Mrs. Ferrier, a woman married and done for.

As for her husband, he went his own way, and contrived, as a rule, to forget her existence, except when he was reminded of it by such a letter as he had just read, or by his sister's well-meant attempts to find him an heiress. Between himself and an heiress there always stood this woman and her boy. At first, he suffered from great apprehensions that she would communicate with his own people. As she did not, he gradually recovered confidence in her word. He could not marry; that was true; but then he did not want to marry. The goddess of Chance was the only bride he cared to worship; some day, most certainly, if Emily lived and the boy lived, there would be a row. Meanwhile, so long as she let him alone, he troubled himself little about her. When his thoughts were turned upon her by such letters as he had just received he realised how bitterly he hated the woman.

"We are going to have a sad change, Professor," said Captain Kemyss. "Virginie is to leave us and to go to England."

"Virginie will go away?" This was, indeed, a change.

"Yes: she had another guardian besides myself, though I had almost forgotten it: she is invited, and we think we ought to let her go: we hope it will not be for long. But who knows? who knows?"

There were letters, too, for the Professor. Among them one which seemed to cause him much agitation.

"Come home at once," it said, among other things. "The longer you stay away, the more difficult will it be for you to get what you want. Come, and you shall join the ranks of the penniless adventurers and make a spoon or spoil a horn."

When they met at dinner, a certain sadness weighed upon their minds. The dinner was silent; for now they all knew what was going to happen, and that the party would be broken up, never, perhaps, all to meet again. Virginie was going to England—the child who had grown up among them. Why, McLoughlin, McAndrew, and the Secretary had seen her every New-Year's Day, and plenty of days between, for seventeen years; they had watched her pass from infancy to childhood; she grew slowly, before their eyes, from a girl, imperfect, bony, angular, to a woman, perfect, rounded, marvellous. She was the joy of the house—the great and chief attraction of Mon Désir. There was no one like her in the island. And now she was to go. What—what would the place be without her?

In Palmiste one is accustomed to seeing people come and go. The officers of the garrison, naturally, are constantly changing; the Governor changes every six years or so; the chiefs of the Civil Service are always changing; and partners and clerks of mercantile houses are perpetually coming out and going home again, to say nothing of those who succumb to the extraordinary thirstiness of the place, and go prematurely to their long home. Therefore, no one was surprised to learn that Captain Ferrier was called home on urgent private affairs.

With the Professor it was different; he was liked by many; he had been in the Colony four or five years, and was regarded, though wrongly, as a permanent resident. He was an eminently cheerful soul; he played a fair hand at whist; he had at times a mordant tongue, and was good at the repression of those who, in Palmiste or elsewhere, endeavour to assert themselves over much; and he had a great fund of information and anecdote, by means of which he could enliven the dinner-tables of the plain, honest Scotch folk who mostly make up the civil society of Palmiste. It was rumoured that he wrote—no one knew what; men who had lived with him knew that he possessed, hidden away in drawers, a quantity of MSS.; that he had been known to extract one, now and then, and to read it for the benefit of his friends; so that, when the news fell upon them that he, too, was going, it was felt that his intention was to go home in order to publish those MSS. or write more.

The dinner languished. The talk was forced. The

Pink Boy told about the gourami-fishing; the Padre recounted some of his sufferings on the boulders; and the Professor narrated his fruitless *chasse* of the camérons; but the Squire was dejected, the two elder ladies sad, Virginie anxious and restless, and Tom downcast. After dinner, the Squire filled his glass and gave his usual New-Year's toast.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I drink to all friends at home. Captain Ferrier, I drink the health of his Lordship. Major, Professor, McAndrew"—he bowed to each in turn in his kindly and courtly way—"to you and to yours, here and at home, I wish a happy New Year."

"It will be a strange New Year to us," he went on, "without our child. Virginie will go, I suppose, by this next mail; we send her to the keeping of good hands; we trust—that is, we hope—that we shall have her back among us in a year or two, when she has shaken off the rustic ways of Palmiste and learned the talk of Mayfair. But we are not afraid. Our Virginie will not forget her old friends; and for hostage, we keep Madame Ferrier with us."

Virginie, who sat on her guardian's left, seized his hand and kissed it with tears.

"As for you, Professor," went on the old planter, "it's a disgraceful thing that you can't stay with us. You've got enough to live upon—what does a book-man want more? You know the foolishness of fighting; here is a haven of rest; and you must needs go back to wrangle wrangle among the literary men of London. For shame, Sir; for shame! Haven't we been kind to you?"

From all voices, except the two officers, there came a chorus,

"Haven't we been kind enough to you, Professor?"

"Heeh, mon!" This was the expostulation of Sandy McAndrew. He felt at the moment that after the many hundreds of sherry-and-bitters, cups of cold tea, brandy-and-sodas, and vermouths taken by the Professor in the room over his office, it was ungrateful in him to go. There needed no words.

"Come with me, Virginie," said Tom, when he could get speech of her. She went out with him into the night, looking like a white ghost upon the dark lawn.

"I want to say something to you, dear," said Tom, "before you go. May I say it to-night?"

"Yes, Tom. Say what you please and all you please."

"It is this, Virginie. You are going to leave us. That is quite right. You have rich friends in England whom you ought to see. I always thought that you would go some day. And you are rich yourself. My dear, we have been so much together, all day long together for all these years, that we are almost like brother and sister, are we not?"

"Go on, Tom," she said, with a quick perception, almost a pang at her heart, that they were not brother and sister.

"I am not clever at books," he continued. "The Professor is, but I am not. And I don't know how to talk about things, like your cousin. I am only a Creole, a son of the soil, a sugar-planter. But, Virginie, I want you to believe one thing."

"I will believe anything, Tom, that you tell me to believe."

"It is a very simple thing. It is only that I love you."

"But I know you do, Tom."

"And that I shall always love you, whatever you do. I mean—because, of course, whatever you do will be right and good, and the best thing that ever any girl did—that even if I hear that you have accepted some man in England, some clever man or some great man, I shall go on loving you all the same. I am what I am, Virginie; but, whatever happens, good or bad, you will remember, will you not—oh! my dear—that here, at Mon Désir, there is one man who loves you always."

"Oh! Tom," she said, bursting into tears. "Why must I go to England at all? Yes; you all love me; you are all too good to me. And I wish it was over, and I was back again, and all was going on just the same as before."

This can never be. One of the most cruel things that Time, who is always dragging and tearing something from us, does is that he will never let pleasant ways remain or renew themselves. He is always destroying. He tramps on, always a lusty youth, whose companion, as in Watts's picture, is pale Death, and beneath his feet as they go the flowers are trampled down and their grace and perfume lost. There may be—there should be always to the end—other flowers before us, but they are not the same.

And at Mon Désir this is the last of the old New-Year days when Virginie, the sweet and innocent child, would be there to meet and greet them with her smile and her pretty soft caressing ways.

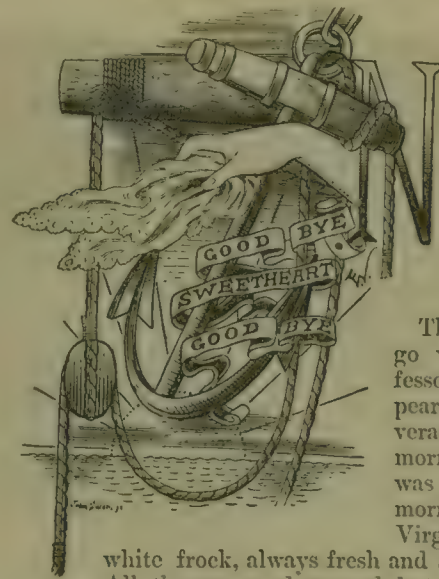
"She must go, Tom," said his father that night, "with her affections free."

"Yes, Sir," he replied; "I have told her to-night that I shall always love her; I thought I ought to tell her that before she goes. But she will go with her affections quite free, as you say."

"Humph!" That was all Captain Kemyss said. What he thought was—What will Mrs. Hallows say if Virginie tells her?

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE MAIL WENT OUT.



NEXT morning the party broke up in sadness, and in the early morning they drove or rode away.

The earliest to go was the Professor. He appeared on the verandah with the morning tea. Tom was there in his morning rags, and Virginie in her

white frock, always fresh and sweet as a lily.

All three were depressed, but the saddest of all was the Professor.

"It is my last visit to Mon Désir," he sighed. "In a few days I shall have left the island, never to see it again."

"If I thought," said Virginie, "that I should never see it again, I would not leave it."

"My most pleasant memories," the Professor went on, lugubriously, "will be those of the days spent here—and of you," he added.

"They ought to be," said Tom, thinking of Virginie, rather than of Mon Désir, though he was narrow-minded enough to think that no place in the world could be more beautiful—which is, indeed, true. Then he got up and went off for his morning ride of inspection. Weeds grow, and coolies are lazy, and Sirdars go to sleep, even though lovely Creoles make all hearts sad by going away.

"You are ambitious," Virginie said. "We have always said that you would not make this colony your home. What is an ambitious man to do here? I wonder, though, whether you will be any happier in England than you might be here, if you chose to remain."

"I dare say not," he said, with a kind of groan. "After all, we must not be for ever looking out for happiness. There is no place in the world where one can laze along so happily as here—nor is the claret so good anywhere, I think. But one must work, and after a time one one wants to do the work one likes best."

"Everybody is always going away," said Virginie. "It is sad for the people who live here. Directly we get fond of anyone he resigns or gets transferred, and so we lose him. And now I am going too. At all events, we shall go in the same ship."

"Yes; I shall not have to say farewell until we get to England. Besides, it is a kind of satisfaction to feel that if I am going you are going too. One cannot think with any comfort of Mon Désir without you. It would be too wretched to come here and find no Virginie. To be sure, there are the ladies, and the Squire, and Tom. But, after all, they are not the principal characters in the piece. They come on the stage, you know, to be grouped round the central figure—you."

"Thank you, Professor," she said, smiling. "You have always been kind to me."

"I have always been in love with you," he replied, with a frankness which did not displease her. She was accustomed to be loved, and regarded the Professor's assurance in much the same light as if it came from her guardian. "Not that I presume upon that fact. It is a beautiful thing for a man like me to be in love with a girl like you. I am proud of it, and, I assure you, grateful to Providence for the magnificent privilege of being in love with such a girl as you."

"Oh! Professor." This incomprehensible statement confused her.

"I mean exactly what I say, though you do not understand what I mean. So long, however, as you know that I am your faithful servant, that is enough."

"What have I done," she asked, "that you and Tom should both say and think such kind things about me?"

The Professor shook his head.

"You cannot yet understand," he replied, "your own power. But you will before long. I do not know what Tom has said, but I hope that he put his case clearly, and that you will not forget anything of what he said. Because, Virginie, sometimes words, when they are first heard, seem to mean little. But, when they are remembered, they get in course of time to acquire their full meaning. Perhaps Tom's words were like these."

She was very young and she was very innocent. Tom's words had not been understood by her in the sense he intended—that is, not in their fullest sense; not in the sense which we who read them give to them. In other words, this child had no thought whatever of love-making, courtship, and such things.

"I remember perfectly what Tom said," she replied, considering a little.

"Don't tell me," he interrupted, hastily. "If you remember them, it is enough. You are going into a strange world; you will get new ideas, and see new people, and learn to think differently in many ways; and you will be far from your old friends. Wherefore,



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W. J. M. J. S. S.

remember Tom always; and if you want counsel think of me, and let me help if I can."

And then the Squire appeared, and the Professor presently took his leave.

Six days later, the mail-steamer, lying in the harbour with her steam up, ready for her start, presented, at five o'clock in the afternoon, an animated and lively appearance. The departure of every mail is attended with plenty of bustle and crowds of visitors; but on this occasion, when, in addition to certain French families, the departures of Virginie Ferrier, her cousin, and the Professor were all to take place together, it seemed as if the whole island were going with them, so crowded

who had come on board to rejoice with their brother over his departure; and the merchants and civilians who had come to mourn over the farewell of the Professor. Sorrow and joy alike demanded the alleviation or encouragement of brandy-and-soda. Continuous were the poppings of corks; loud was the shouting for the steward; higher and still higher grew the pile of empty soda-water bottles.

On deck a little court surrounded Virginie. Among them were the Pink Boy and the Padre, both desperately in love, though their case was hopeless indeed. His Reverence, for his part, dreamed of a sympathetic helpmeet, who would admire his sermons, encourage his

ambitions, and help him to show the colony an example of the active Church life. It did not occur to him that a girl brought up as Virginie had been might become many things; but ecclesiasticism was impossible for her. The Pink Boy thought how delightful a thing it would be to have Virginie with him in those hot rooms of his over the Bank, in pleasing contiguity to the guano dépôts, and the port, and the bawling crowd, always engaged in lading and unlading. And, for his part, he did not understand how such a girl could not marry such a boy as himself. They went on dreaming, however; now, for reasons which will presently appear, they will dream in this way no more. The girl was flushed with the excitement and the emotion of leave-taking. She was in charge of a French lady, who was going all the way to London. All the farewells had been said but one. There only remained, of the home circle, her guardian: her cheek was flushed, and her eyes were bright and tear-stained. She had no heart for the compliments and pretty things which one after the other came to say to her.

At last there came the time of departure.

A beautiful gradation marks the ceremony of leave-taking on board the mail. First, the comparative strangers; next, the friends; then the intimate friends; last, the members of the household.

Thus, when the officers and the merchants, and those of the French people who knew her, had offered their hands and wished Virginie *bon voyage*, and all, even the Padre and the Pink Boy, were over the side of the ship and in their boats, there remained the hardest parting of all—that with her fond and faithful guardian.

He kissed her forehead, cheeks, and lips.

"My dear," he said, taking her in his arms, "it is

PART II.—IN THE SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

A ROSE OF JUNE.



best for you. It is what your father would have wished. Why should we repine? Yet, it will be sad, indeed, without you."

So they parted. Captain Kemyss was the last to leave the ship before the bell rang; the whistle shrieked, the screw turned, and the great ship began once more to drive its long white furrow on the main. But the old man's eyes were dim, and for a while he could not see anything.

When they cleared, he became aware that Virginie was standing aft, beside the steersman; and behind her were the Professor and her cousin, and she was waving her handkerchief and crying. At sight of her tears, the Pink Boy's eyes filled, and he choked, and then he said a wicked word to one of the boatmen, which gave him relief. And the Padre, who felt a similar inclination to choke, obtained relief by rebuking the Pink Boy for that wicked word. So they came ashore, and for many days the light of the sun was dim to them, and curry, even prawn curry, had no flavour.

It was then six o'clock, and it wanted nearly an hour to sunset.

As for Tom, the reasons why he was not on board were perfectly well known to everyone, and there was a general feeling that they did him credit. If people are in love, and are soft-hearted and cannot trust themselves to say good-bye in public, then people had better stay ashore, which Tom did. But he had his little plan in his own mind, and this is what he did.

From Mon Désir to the Signal-mountain is a good twelve miles by road. But a man with strong nerves and steady head can find a much shorter path by way of the mountains, which lie in an amphitheatre round the town.

They are rather awful hills to climb about, being provided, more plentifully than falls to the lot of most hills, with bare faces of rock and precipices and real saddle-backs, along which the rare visitor, who would get along the top, has to drag himself with a leg hanging over each side; but Tom knew the way well, and had too often achieved the feat to think about the danger. Therefore, as he intended to see the last of the girl he loved, he climbed along this breakneck ridge, and made his way to the Signal-mountain.

There is always a man on watch up there; he is provided with a telescope two yards long or so; he has a little hut half buried in the rock, and a mast provided with cross-trees and ropes for signalling the approach of ships; he is up at break of day and remains on watch till sunset. And when hurricanes come he is generally blown far away out to sea, hut, telescope, mast, and all.

Tom stood beside the hut with the telescope in his hand, and watched the departure of the steamer. First he saw the crowds on board break up and disappear over the sides, till there were only the passengers and the crew left on deck; then he saw his father, who was the last to leave; and then he saw Virginie standing at the helm waving her handkerchief. At first he could see her face, and he knew that she was weeping. The screw went round. The ship passed out of the quiet harbour waters and began to roll in the waves of the Indian Ocean. Virginie stood there still, after the point was cleared, when she could no longer see her friends, watching the receding shores of the island she had never left before. What thoughts, what memories were in the girl's mind! Her lover remained motionless, glass in hand, while the ship grew less, and the figures on deck grew smaller, till the white dress, the last he saw of Virginie, vanished altogether. Then he watched the ship itself till the sun went down and the night fell, and ship, and sea, and all dropped out of sight. Then, with heavy heart, he slowly descended the hill. He had seen the last of Virginie. How and when would he see her again?

flowers on a dinner-table, the better to set off the guests. They do not belong to nature at all, any more than the cascade at St. Cloud. They are provided by Fortnum and Mason, or some other Firm, for a splendid banquet of sunshine and fine weather, to which all are invited alike, but to which none should come who are morose, envious, disappointed, and ill-natured. For these there is Regent's Park, with the daisies and the dandelions of Dame Nature.

Among those who rode was Virginie. With her were her cousins, Guy and Maude Ferrier. Six months of the strong, cold English air had taken something from the delicate bloom which lay upon the cheek of the fair Creole beneath her own palms, and had given her a little of the hardy and robust look of her English sisters. Just now, flushed with the exercise and the excitement, the warm air, the soft sunshine and the animated scene about her, the girl had lost for the moment all her Creole languor, and was in very truth become an English girl in appearance. Whether she lost or gained by the difference I do not know. Certainly, of all the young and beautiful women in the Park that morning there was none, English or otherwise, more beautiful than this fair Creole, a fact observed by many of those philosophers who love to lean over the railings and meditate in the midst of youth, beauty, wealth, flowers, gay and careless talk, on the happiness lying ready to hand for virtuous people in the best of all possible worlds. Especially, if virtuous people find their own happiness in witnessing the joy of others. Captain Ferrier was master of several accomplishments, besides the art of card-playing and gambling; among other things, he could ride well, and looked his best on horseback. Beside him rode his sister, also an accomplished horsewoman. Mounted, she looked handsome, being tall and of graceful figure. When she dismounted you perceived, first, that she was no longer very young, being, in fact, four years older than her brother, and he was twenty-eight; next, she was thin, and her pale face, with its large and lustrous eyes, wore an anxious look, as if she was continually suffering for the sins of others—which, indeed, was her hapless case. This expression of face is more often found in women than in men, because the manly mind does not set its hopes too much on the achievements of other men; and when you see it you may be very sure that husbands, sons, or brothers have "turned out bad." For the moment, however, she, too, felt happy, because it seemed at last as if a thing on which she had set all her hopes was really likely to take place.

"Make love to her on board."

That was Maude's injunction to her brother when she wrote to him in Palmiste Island. Captain Ferrier would, perhaps, have obeyed, but for one circumstance: he found on board a young fellow who was as fond of cards as himself; and he preferred playing écarté or piquet in the smoking-cabin, for'ard, to dangling after his cousin on the after-deck. Besides, he could not present himself, except as a sort of rival—good Heavens! a rival—to that fellow, Percival. Now Percival, who certainly was not the son of a Peer, but had started quite as a second-class passenger in life, and was by no means desirous of passing himself off as anything better, was for some unknown reason peculiarly hateful to this young man; the more so, because Virginie in his society seemed always more happy than in his own. But, indeed, it is absurd to account for the hatreds and jealousies of selfish men, because they are terribly vain, and brood, and take imaginary offence, and magnify their own importance, and do not see the proportions of things; so that they become very thorough haters indeed. If their lives were spared long enough, they would end by hating all the

world. The disposition of those long-lived Patriarchs Mahalcel and that of his more distinguished great-grandson, are not stated; but if they were as selfish as Guy Ferrier, one perceives clearly how for the last two or three hundred years of their lives they would have regarded the whole of mankind with an unrelenting hatred. It has been suggested, or dreamed, or told after revelation by some philosophers of the more profound kind, that when this kind of men die they are presently transported to a remarkable island, where there are many beautiful and toothsome things, but not enough to go round. In the general game of grab which is always going on, and on account of its disappointing results, they are said to develop quite astonishing hatreds.

Guy Ferrier learned at school to despise the whole of mankind except a few who need do nothing, but are born to enjoy; most of the boys in his own set who held those views went out into the world and shook off this narrow view; he went out into the world and retained it. He despised, for instance, the honest Scotch merchants because they bought, to sell again, cargoes of sugar; and he despised the Professor because he held a post by which he earned his living. He despised him so heartily, and found it so intolerable to be addressed by him on terms of equality, that he began to hate and despise his cousin for liking him. And his mind was so warped by prejudice, and so narrow, that he found it difficult afterwards to shake off the dislike. He therefore avoided the quarter-deck as much as possible, and spent his time chiefly with his venturesome friend, from whom, in the course of the voyage, he won so large a sum that he could afford to send the Major a cheque for five hundred on account. But it is not every day that a man who is a player, but not a fine player, picks up another who is also a player and a more reckless player than himself.

He had one chance. He sat opposite to Virginie at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, being naturally placed near the Captain, while the obscure Professor had to content himself with a seat at the chief officer's side. It was impossible for any young man to sit opposite to the girl every day for three hours or so—because in this line of steamers meals are considered the chief business of the day, and must not be hurried—without perceiving that she was an extremely attractive young lady. Yet his mind was not open to the sweet influences of love. A lover ought to be light-hearted, and he was heavy-hearted; a lover ought to look on the world cheerfully; Captain Ferrier regarded it gloomily, as a place where luck is generally against the player, and where people are wickedly impatient to be paid. So that the innocence and ignorance of the girl, her curiosity about the great world she was going to visit, her vague hopes and little fears, which to most men were charming, irritated him. If Maude wanted him to marry her, he thought, sulkily, she might arrange the thing herself—at all events, any kind of marked attention before all these people was out of the question. He paid her no attention at all; he made no attempt to appear interesting or clever, or profound or remarkable in any way, as is frequently done by men who open the old-fashioned siege in the old-fashioned way, and try to begin by inspiring respect. Virginie thought her cousin a rather morose young man, who never laughed, and smiled only when politeness required the effort. He was, in fact, a morose young man. It is one of the pleasing results of a life devoted to the pursuit of "pleasure," that makes a man, quite prematurely, incapable of mirth, merriment, or joy of heart. It is very odd, but it is so. Sometimes one thinks that those black brethren of Ceylon who never laugh must be one and all engaged in the pursuit of pleasure.

When the voyage was over, and Guy Ferrier met his sister, he was fain to confess that he had made no progress whatever.

She shook her head, sadly.

"Things, Guy," she said, "can no longer be trifled with. There is absolutely no more money for you."

"There must be some," he replied. "I must get a couple of thousand at least before long."

"How long can you wait, Guy?"

"I do not know. Perhaps three months; perhaps four or five. I must have money, Maude."

"Can you not borrow more? You have raised money before on your reversionary interests—can you raise no more?"

"No; not a penny more. They are mortgaged to the hilt."

She sighed heavily.

"My poor father! If he only knew!" Then she thought of what her brother had done, the futility of helping him; the vain sacrifices she herself had made filled her with wrath which for the moment overcame her affection. "Oh! Guy—Guy—what a shameful—what a wicked thing it is! All gone the same way, and no use to help, no use to advise."

"If you have nothing but reproaches, Maude, I will go. I did think that from you I should meet with a little sympathy. But women are all alike."

"Yes," she said, bitterly, "we are all alike: we sit at home and hope and pray, and the Prodigal goes on, and takes everything and throws it away. We are all alike, Guy: we sit and suffer, and can do nothing."

He made no reply, because there was nothing to say. This thin and anxious woman of thirty had given him everything. He had taken all her own money

and all she could get from her father; he had taken her jewels and sold them; he had taken her youth and beauty; he had promised, he had made countless promises, but he broke them all. It would have been better for her—far better—if at the very first mess she had left her brother to flounder out as best he might. Now she had done so much, she was bound to go on; she must stand by him and suffer to the end.

She had sunk into a chair, and sat with clasped hands, and eyes which had no tears in them. She could not cry for the indignation and bitterness in her heart.

"And my father knows nothing," she said. "He knows nothing. And some day he must be told, because I can help you no longer."

"If he must know, he must, I suppose," her brother replied, carelessly.

"There is your cousin, Guy: can you not even think of her?"

"I have thought about her, Maude. In fact, I think about her every day. Isn't it an infernal shame that a girl like that should have a hundred thousand pounds, and I should be hard up for a trifle of two thousand?"

"Is that all you think about?"

"Enough, too; I should say."

"What is she like?"

"I believe you would call her pretty. She's a fair girl; and her manners are good—at least I dare say they are. She doesn't do anything dreadful. But you had better call upon her. She thinks a great deal about the relationship, and you may be civil to her."

"And won't you think about her, Guy, in the way I want? Think how it would set you up to marry her. You could buy back all your mortgages. You could start quite fair again. There would be no more debts and worries."

"I tell you I do think about her."

"Then why—oh! Guy—why——?"

"Because I do not want to marry any woman. Is that sufficient reason for you?"

"I shall do what I can for you, Guy. When your difficulties are so great that you can bear them no longer, you will, perhaps, take the step which will relieve you. *It is the only step, remember.* Meantime, I will do my best to prepare the way for you."

He made no reply, but left her with moody and morose face.

These schemes, these difficulties, were concealed from the head of the house, Lord Ferrier, who, although he found his son difficult to get on with, and taking small interest in the things which interested himself, was yet perfectly satisfied as regards his manner of life. Let the young man do what he pleased up to a certain time: he had, himself, followed the traditions of the House in serving under the colours for a term, before becoming a simple country gentleman. Let his son do the same thing. As for himself, he loved the simple life of his country house. He was a farmer and a landlord before everything else. Things were tight with him, because many of his farms were unlet; but things would improve. There was no money, because it had all been laid out in unproductive improvements; and, at the best, Lord Ferrier was poor for a Peer. A stately, tall man of sixty odd years, with a Presence, who had gone beautifully grey, which is much better than going bald. He was taller than his son; his head was larger; his figure was broader; his appearance more solid; and his eyes were better. The eyes are the first of human features to catch the expression which grows out of the life which men lead; then it goes to the mouth and lips; and, finally, it is stamped as a seal upon the forehead. The stamp upon the old Lord's forehead was what may be expected in that of a man who preserved those old-fashioned ideas about honour, duty, religion, loyalty, patriotism, property, rank, contentment, thrift, modesty, which formerly stood the old country in good stead, and seem now doomed to decay and disappearance; a man who was proud of his name and descent, was kind of heart and considerate towards all men; who was courtly in manner and sincere of speech; a man who hated Radicals, Republicans, Communists, Socialists, Nihilists, Comtists, Atheists, and persons of "advanced" views generally, as he hated the DEVIL. As for his estates, he was a tenant for life; he held them on trust; it was his duty to hand them on to his successor improved and enlarged. And, as every gentleman ought to have a hobby, it was Lord Ferrier's hobby that he could paint. He had painted steadily for forty years; and during the whole of the time, according to his friends, his painting had grown steadily worse. Yet every year he sent a picture to the Royal Academy, which was promptly rejected; and every year he made dozens of studies, landscapes, heads, cattle-pieces, and river-scenes—working as hard at his hobby as any professional man at the calling which gave him daily bread.

Maude called upon her cousin, and was gracious to her and to her guardian. The beauty and the grace of the girl, so soft, so delicate, so ethereal, surprised her. Was her brother a stone, that he should have been blind to this miracle of loveliness? Her manner was a little shy, because she was so inexperienced and so ignorant; but it was the manner of a lady. She invited her, with Mrs. Hallows, to dinner alone, so that it would be a dinner *en famille*, she said.

To this first entertainment she did not invite her brother—for reasons. Lord Ferrier would interest the girl more. And, in fact, Virginia was greatly moved by the kind and affectionate reception which the

venerated head of the house accorded her. He told her how he had been at school with her father, his first cousin, and what a good fellow he had always been, and how she resembled him in face, though her father was never—well—never half so charming; and he paid her so many compliments and showed her so much kindness that Virginia fell in love with him at once. The compliments and kindness of old men always please girls: if they are girls of the world they are pleased because men of such wide experience should show such admirable discrimination; if they are girls new to the world they are pleased because they are not afraid. The worst of young men's flattery is that one never knows what they may say next, and that they may at any moment go on to a proposal.

Maude began at once, so as to lose no time, to acquire that influence over her cousin's mind which would assist her in her designs. She must woo Virginia for her brother. She must make this girl in love with herself, with Lord Ferrier, with the house, with everything belonging to them, before she would try to make her fall in love with Guy. She called nearly every day; she sent frequent invitations; she drove with her; she made her father buy a horse for her, and then she rode with her; she managed so that if Virginia went anywhere, or saw anything, it should seem as if by her advice or help. She gave her wise counsel in matters of dress. She instructed her in the things which girls *must* know, or seem to know; and she took her in hand in the matters of art and music, of which Virginia was profoundly ignorant. In all Palmiste there is not such a thing as a picture; while as to music, they know little or nothing beyond the elementary tune. And always she pleased the girl, who was easily pleased, by a show of affection, sympathy, and interest, as if she had always longed to know her, and had studied carefully how she could be of use to her. At the same time, lest Mrs. Hallows should be jealous, she treated her as if she was an old and valued friend, instead of a mere acquaintance.

Then Virginia, thus assisted, began to go into society.

From her point of view it was bewildering. All the people seemed to know everybody, and to be able to talk about everything. For herself, she knew nothing, and she knew nobody. She was not able, at first, to talk about anything. After a little, she began to understand something. Maude taught her the way in which pictures, and music, and books are talked about. But the things of real interest, the family histories, the personal gossip, she could not master. She was also greatly astonished, at first, because no one took the smallest interest in the events and politics of Palmiste Island. In her eyes, this place was the most important, in everybody's eyes, of all the British dominions, next to England itself. Small as it was, only a tiny speck in the ocean, it grew such a quantity of sugar, and had so romantic a history, that Australia, New Zealand, Canada, seemed of comparatively small importance. And she could not possibly understand how anybody could fail to be interested in its politics, its fertility, its beauty, or the differences in the social position of the inhabitants. Most astonishing thing of all, she actually once met a coloured man, a native of the island, at a dance, and the English girls were dancing with him! Happily, the man had not the presumption to ask her for a dance. Then she met a man who had been a Governor there, and nobody called him "Your Excellency," or paid him the slightest reverence or respect; and men talked slightly of Colonial Bishops; and gentlemen who were honourable members of the Legislative Council were held as nought. These things were strange to her at first. Maude was worse than anybody. She refused to pretend any interest in Palmiste: she would talk of nothing but England, and, which Virginia liked, especially of the honour and glory of the Ferrier House. But daily she felt more and more how small a thing was her own sugar estate and simple bungalow compared with the splendid estates and noble houses of the people to whom she now belonged.

"Why should you trouble your head about the place?" Maude said. "You will marry and settle in England, and your mother will then, I hope, come home and live with you. You have no other friends there, have you?"

"Oh! yes. I have many friends. There is my guardian, Captain Kemyss, to begin with; and Madame, and Tom."

"Tom! Who is Tom?"

"Tom is Captain Kemyss's son, you know. He always told me he loved me."

"That seems great presumption; but perhaps he only meant it in a brotherly sense."

"Of course," said Virginia. "Tom was always a brother to me."

Poor Tom!

"And then," she continued, "there was the Professor."

"What was he?"

"He is in England now. He isn't a Professor any more; and his name is Percival. He always said he loved me, too."

"They showed their good taste, my dear Virginia," said Maude, laughing. "But I think it was great impudence to tell you of it. Perhaps they merely wanted to make you understand that they really had good taste. No doubt, however, they have already consoled themselves."

When the first strangeness had gone off, when Virginia had become an established and constant visitor at the house, when her father became, by his own admiration of the girl, an unwitting accomplice in her schemes, Maude began, but cautiously, to talk about her brother. He seldom went into general society, she explained, because he was too fastidious for general society; the dreadful want of taste in conversation, dress, and manners irritated him; he did not, certainly, belong to the dancing set; it was not to be expected of him that he would go to balls for the sake of the supper, as many men do in this abominable town. Guy was, as no doubt Virginia had already discovered, a man of the most refined and fastidious taste; he was not a great talker, but his opinions were convictions; he never tried to show his own superiority, but when he was called upon, Maude said, the true ring of intellect was heard in his every utterance; what he said was always right; what he did was always noble. Maude drew the picture of the brother she ought to have had; the splendid result of generations of careful training; the perfect knight; the statesman of the future; the prop and support of the Conservative cause. Heavens! if men only understood how women love them to be great and strong! They know that we want them to be beautiful, and they do their best, all out of the kindness of their hearts, to meet our views. But we, selfish creatures that we are, waste and idle our lives away and do nothing, so that our sisters and wives are fain to be ashamed of us, and to apologise for us instead of being proud and happy because we are so brave, and so industrious. Lay it to heart, my brothers.

One thing astonished Maude; yet she seemed to understand it. Guy had never fallen in love with any woman. This was not because his nature was cold, for, she said, he was a man of the deepest and warmest feeling, but it arose from his refined taste and the dread which he naturally felt lest he should find something in his wife, when it was too late, to trouble and irritate him. "Think, my dear Virginia," she said, clasping her hands, "if such a man, with nerves so highly strung, should have to live all his days with a person whose very appearance might irritate him hourly. My dear child, if he could only find a true wife somewhere; if he could only find a woman of your tender heart and sweet temper and sympathetic susceptibilities. But there," she sighed, "men never see what is lying before their very feet."

"Sometimes I think," she said, warming to her subject, "that Guy is like a knight of romance. There was never any frivolity about him; he could never endure what some young men call fun. Heaven protect us from the funny man! He never wanted to laugh at foolish jokes and stories. My dear, did you ever see a whole theatre full of people laughing because a man has tumbled down and hurt himself? He never wanted to talk, even as a boy, to show his wisdom. You have observed, probably, his silent moods. It is by meditation that wisdom comes. When he is in a silent mood he loves to hear grave music. I was glad when he came in last night and sat down in a corner, not wanting to talk, that you were playing that sonata. Your playing, dear child, like your voice, soothes him. My own voice is too loud for him, and my playing is too—what shall I say?—too brilliant. I play as I was taught, and I suppose I think too much about execution."

"Guy was saying the other day"—this was during another of Maude's confidential conversations—"that beautiful women are made for beautiful rooms. Our own rooms, he said, never look properly furnished unless Virginia is in them. Was it not pretty of him, my dear?"

These and a thousand such sayings could not fail to produce an effect upon a girl so utterly inexperienced as Virginia. Mrs. Hallows, who knew perfectly well what they meant, and who perfectly appreciated the value of her ward, fell in with the plot, because she honestly thought the match a highly advantageous one for the girl. She wrote to that effect indeed to Captain Kemyss. "I hear nothing very much," she said, "against Captain Ferrier's reputation, except that he is a man of very few friends. His chief fault in my eyes, is that if he intends to become Virginia's lover, he shows very little ardour. Indeed, he has not even begun to make love. But his sister assures me that his affections are very strongly engaged, and that he only hesitates because he thinks that the young lady should at least have time to look round her. This seems honourable, though not what one would expect of a young man, when so beautiful an heiress is in the case. Indeed, I should prefer a little anxiety lest so great a prize should be carried off by someone else. As regards our dear girl, she looks upon Maude as her greatest friend; she considers Maude's brother to be all that a fond sister has painted him. And though I do not suppose that she is at all what we used to call 'in love,' I do think that she waits but the word. When that is spoken, there will be no other man in the world for her but Captain Ferrier."

"You must not think that she forgets her Palmiste friends; on the contrary, she is always thinking of you all—and for you, and especially of her brother Tom. But she writes to you so often that I need not assure you any farther upon this point."

"So she will marry her cousin after all," said Captain Kemyss, laying down the letter, with a sigh. "I do not like him; but I may be wrong. After all, it is satisfactory to think that she will be Lady

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"The ladies listened in soft and dreamy manner."—Chap. III.



was going to marry a girl; no doubt the fair-haired girl riding alongside him, who had got, it was said, nothing short of a hundred, yes, a hundred thousand at her back. Then they passed by and others followed, and a good many of the men who rode that morning seemed to interest these gentlemen with big cigars and showy garments and diamond rings.

Now where the crowd was thickest, opposite Hyde Park-gate, where the chairs were ranged in a double row and were all filled, there stood a lady, still young, being not more than five or six-and-twenty, accompanied by an old gentleman, and surrounded by a small court of gentlemen. Other ladies as they passed turned their heads and looked at her with curiosity—that is a polite way of saying that they stared their very rudest and hardest at her. She was well dressed—extraordinarily well dressed—and was a most striking and handsome woman, with regular, strongly marked features, a strong mouth and chin, and rather a loud voice. Outside the little circle of her friends stood, or strolled, all looking at her, a noble army of martyrs—young men—who longed to make her acquaintance, but could not because they had no one who would introduce them. For this lady was no other than Violet Lovelace, the new light of the London stage, as clever and sparkling as any who had ever offered their beauty and their wit for the admiration of the public. And this little circle round her consisted of those who could boast of an acquaintance with her, in right of which they became her courtiers. And the old gentleman—he was manifestly old, though his wig was black and curly, because his lips trembled and his eyes were crowsfooted—was Paul Perigal, for many years attached to the Princess's Theatre. He was, in fact, in his seventy-fifth year, and he dressed carefully after the fashion of his thirty-fifth



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summer, which was when her gracious Majesty was still a youthful bride, and when the mode as regards collars, neckties, and hats differed in some important details from the present. Violet Lovelace retained her old friend and tutor in her house as her companion: he kept the house going, paid the bills, was her faithful steward, saw that the "boy" was looked after when his mother was at rehearsal, and went with her wherever she went. Now as Violet was invited a good deal to supper and breakfast, and liked to accept as many invitations as possible, being a kind-hearted person, glad to bestow a little happiness wherever she could, the old man was more than her companion and friend—he was her chaperon: and nobody lived who could truthfully boast that Violet Lovelace had accepted an invitation alone.

While they were all talking, the lady half turned her head and looked at the riders. Then she stopped laughing suddenly.

"What is it, Violet?" asked one of her friends—everybody called her by her Christian name. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I have, my Lord," she replied. "I have seen a ghost whom I hoped never to see again; and I feel as

in gay and gladsome Piccadilly, which has a thousand eyes—"Daddy, if I thought the boy was going to turn out like his father, I would—no—I would ask you to take him away and kill him."

"He won't," said Paul. "With such a training as I have given him, and such an example as mine, he can't."

"Who was the girl with him, I wonder? Not that I care. She seemed pretty."

"If he repents, and comes home and asks forgiveness, I suppose you will take him on again."

"Never, never! And he knows it. Marriage is always a lottery. Some men belong to the good lottery; most to the bad lottery. My husband, Daddy, is one of the very last and worst; he is, indeed, a most disgraceful lottery. But even he won't try on the repentant dodge. Don't talk about him any more, and let us buy something to take home to the boy."

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE'S FRIEND.

"I think, Elsie," said Mr. Percival, formerly called the Professor, "that this is a chapter which will fire the imagination, and make the blood boil and the pulses quicken. Don't you find your generous young heart leaping up?"

He was reading from a manuscript, and a girl was sitting at the open window listening. The place was a first-floor in one of those streets of profound respectability—from the lodging-house point of view—about Bloomsbury. A box of mignonette was in the window, which assisted the imagination and helped the listener to follow the reader far away among woods and meadows, streams and hills. The girl was quite young, not more than eighteen or nineteen; she was listening critically, and she shook her head to express a kind of doubt. It was a head of a pretty shape, set off by the last fashion of wearing the hair, which reveals the shape of a head, and is therefore fatal to many a girl who might otherwise be counted beautiful. Her face belonged to a not uncommon type, whose beauty depends chiefly on expression; it is a good, safe kind of beauty, because when it once takes hold of a man, it grows upon him, and fastens upon him, until he cares for no other kind of face in the world.

Mr. Percival, no longer the Professor, for he had resigned, and was now engaged on making that spoon or spoiling that horn, lived in the house as lodger. He had lived there before he went abroad, so that he returned to it as an old friend. Elsie, the daughter of the house, was a school-girl when he went away, and a grown up girl when he came back. There was only one other lodger, and he was an old gentleman who gave no trouble; and on the proceeds and profits derived from her two lodgers, Elsie's mother, who was a widow, paid her rent and taxes and supplemented the family income. All day long, until half-past seven, Elsie was the governess of a child of five or six; in the evening, resuming an old custom of her childhood, she became

the companion and confidante of Mr. Percival, a pleasant, conversational, good-natured sort of man, who liked companionship, especially of the youthful female kind. Sometimes she went for walks with him in the quiet squares; or she sat with him, or she read with him, or even she went to the theatre with him, in a manner which would have been compromising to the last degree in some circles; but in Elsie's, which can hardly be called a circle, and yet was not a square—perhaps a crescent, an oblong—it didn't matter. She had no friends who would inquire what were Mr. Percival's intentions, and, indeed, at present he had none, because Elsie seemed to him still the child he remembered when he was last in London, and because he was without an income and was feeling his way along the thorny path of literature, dreaming and devising great things, and meanwhile thinking himself lucky when he had a book tossed to him for review, or got an article accepted, or hit upon an idea which could be afterwards worked up. As for falling in love with Elsie, that, if you please, no more entered into his mind than into hers. He was ten years older than herself, which at eighteen seems a frightful difference. She knew, besides, that he was already in love with a young lady as beautiful as a queen, whom he could never marry by reason of one Tom, who somehow stood in the way. This young lady was in England, having come across the seas in his company, but he did not go to see her, because, Elsie thought, he felt that it would be a pity for him to get more entangled in this hopeless labyrinth of love. Besides, a literary man wants to keep his brain clear, and in that novel he was writing, from which he read to her sometimes in the evening, there was a man so madly in love with a young lady whom both hero and

novelist thought was perfect, yet who seemed to Elsie a whimsical woman, that merely to portray his emotions it was necessary for the mind of the writer to be quite free from any troubles of its own; the largest and fullest sympathy was required for love of this passionate kind.



"He had painted for forty years."

When the work was completed it would be time to visit Virginia, whose Christian name Elsie had heard many hundreds of times.

She shook her head, criticising the chapter.

"I suppose it is a powerful scene," she said; "but, you know, they wouldn't really go on like that. Nobody possibly could."

"What would they do, then?"

"Oh! I don't know. They would feel angry and disappointed with each other. Then they would go away and break things off, I suppose."

"It is clear to me, my child, that you have not the faintest conception of the passion of love. How should



"And a girl was sitting at the open window, listening."

you?" he sighed. "For my own part, I have experience. I portray, with a change of name, my own feelings towards Virginia."

"Oh!" She laughed the laugh of the Doubter. "Your passion, indeed! But you have grown desperate, and you—why you go on as happily as if you had no passion."

"The sting is concealed," he said. "It is like the hair shirt. Many a lusty knight of old was found after death to have worn a hair shirt unknown to his friends."

"Yes," she said, sharply. "They put on flannel first, I suppose. Why can't you draw things as they



"There stood a lady, still young"

if buckets of cold water were being poured down my back. So I think I will go home. Come, Daddy!"

"The ghost I saw, Daddy," she explained, when they were outside the park, "was the ghost of my husband. He did not see me. The sight of him made me long to—to say something I should not. A lady must not be violent, must she?"

Paul shook his head doubtfully.

"Violence," he said, "sometimes means fire. You ought to rise to the occasion. Give me a woman who can feel a situation and rip out the words as if she meant them. But such a woman is hard to find nowadays. When I was a young man—"

"I do feel the situation, Daddy. I assure you, I feel it very strongly. And I should like very much to rip out the words. But, somehow, I don't think the audience would have been pleased. We must always consider the stalls, you know. In your young days you only played for the pit. Let us go home. The sunshine has turned into cloud for us, and the warm air is cold."

"The 'Return of the Husband,'" murmured Paul. "Adapted from the French of 'Le Mari Repenti.' Principal parts by Miss Violet Lovelace and Mr. —. I remember he said his name was Richard Johnson; but he looked like Mr. Plantagenet Howard."

"Never mind his name, Daddy. That was his sister riding with him—the sallow-faced woman, with black hair and big eyes and a thin figure. She looked at me as she passed with the curious contempt which makes us actresses love the real lady so much. Bless her! I know all about her. My husband takes all her money from her to pay his debts. Tender, thoughtful brother he is! Daddy"—she clasped the old man's arm with both her hands, though they were in the open,

are and people as they talk? That is what I like to read about."

"Profound student of human nature! Remember that it is the province of Art not so much to present Nature faithfully as to present things as they should happen—but don't. Nature is flat. Situations are wasted. In real life, my child, events do not happen dramatically; nor are the right things said at the right moment; nor are there surprises—though, to be sure, *il n'y a rien sur que l'imprévu*. Real life, Elsie, is apt to be dull"—

"Horribly dull," said the philosopher of eighteen. "Frightfully dull, sometimes."

"Yes, and flat, and unhappy; being made unhappy chiefly by little things, not big calamities. Temper, I believe, and want of sympathy, and want of change, and want of society, make up most of the domestic unhappiness which no novelist has had the courage to tackle. It is woman's work, not man's, to write about the little pin-prickings of the home life. Did you ever have prickly heat, Elsie? Of course you have not. Then you can't understand—but I can—what many of our beautiful English homes are like. Real life? No; I do not think I shall tackle the subject of real life. Romance is what I shall freeze to."

"Want of change seems to me the worst thing of all," said Elsie. "Look at my poor father. He was born in London, he lived in London, and he never went out of London, because he never could afford it. Hampstead he called the country. It was his only idea of country, poor dear. It was mine, too, till you first came and we began to go about together."



"She threw herself at his feet in tears of pity and of shame."—Part II., Chap. XI.



"Virginie sat listening in wonder."—Part II., Chap. X.



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"Yes," said the great writer, as yet unknown. "we have made pilgrimages on Sundays, haven't we? We know the pit of the theatre, do we not? We have ventured on the river at Hampton, happy Hampton! we two together. Courage, Elsie, life must not be monotonous for you."

"Then life ought to be honest," said the girl, passionately. "Why, I am a common cheat and impostor."

"Nay, nay," said her adviser. "If Miss Violet Lovelace is pleased with your manner and work, surely that is enough."

"She advertised for a perfect lady for her boy. I answered the advertisement. She was very good to me, and said at the beginning such kind things about my manners you know, that I did not dare to undeceive her. 'My dear,' she said, 'I want a perfect lady, because my boy will be a gentleman. You may go on calling me Miss Violet Lovelace if you like, because that is my stage name; but I am a married woman, and my husband is a Wretch, although he is a gentleman of good family. I am separated from him. As for myself, I am not quite a lady—off the stage; but I am getting on, and when the boy grows up and can make comparisons, he shall not be ashamed of his mother. Of course, I have few opportunities of knowing real ladies in private life. So now you see what I want, and if you will try, and will be good and patient with the boy, I shall always be more grateful to you than words can tell.' That was what she said; and I deceived her, and said I would try."

"The word lady, Elsie," said Mr. Percival, putting aside his manuscript, "covers an area about equal in extent to that claimed for the word gentleman."

"If I had told her that my father was nothing but a humble clerk in a small house of business, and that my mother took in lodgers, would she have received me as her governess? You know she wouldn't."

"The question is, rather, if she knew these facts now would she consider you unfit for the post? Because you see, my child, she seems to like you."

"I am sure she likes me. Nobody could be more affectionate to me, or kinder, which makes the deception worse."

"Very good, then. And you like the boy?"

"Who could help liking the dear child?"

"In that case, Elsie, trouble not your little head about possibilities. For there are many. Enjoy the good fortune that comes in your way. Sunshine is scarce. Kind persons are scarce. If Miss Violet Lovelace asks you any questions about yourself, tell her what you please. Meanwhile, be as useful as you can to the boy. Now, my child, I am going to put away the Novel. I say, though," he added, lovingly regarding his manuscript, "the last is really a most tremendous chapter. I wonder how Thackeray would have treated it. But, poor man, he never could have conceived a situation so dramatic and so terrible; and I am going to have a quiet pipe. You need not go unless you like. In fact, I would rather you stayed."

She did stay. Nothing could have been a greater reversal of the manners and customs of the perfect lady, whom Elsie was supposed to present for the ensample of the boy, than for a girl of eighteen to be sitting night after night with a young man of eight-and-twenty—alone, if you please. Yet Elsie liked it. And the young man liked it. And Elsie's mother thought no harm of it, and if she did she was welcome to walk up stairs and put her head in and speak her mind.

"Miss Violet," said Elsie, "came home to-day at half-past twelve in a very low way. First, she sat down and sighed as if her heart was breaking. Then she wished she had never been born. After that she kissed the boy, and said that if it was not for him she could wish that she was dead. When they served our dinner, which is her breakfast, you know, because she has to sit up half the night sometimes and gets up late, she would not eat anything."

"Got a cold?" asked Percival.

"Oh! no. She never catches cold, though the theatre is full of draughts. She got up presently and went away to her own room. Then Mr. Perigal, who had been sighing with her, like a pump, whispered to me that she had seen her husband in the Park."

"This grows mysterious. Is her husband generally invisible?"

"Mr. Perigal told me all about her marriage. She married a gentleman who was in love with her because she was so beautiful and so clever. Mr. Perigal was at the wedding, with her father, who is a stage carpenter at Drury Lane. Mr. Perigal believes that he was married under a false name. Anyhow, she won't say who or what the man is. But he must be a very bad man, because she left him and came back to Mr. Perigal, and said that nothing would ever induce her to go back to her husband, or to take any kind of help from him. And to-day she saw him riding in the Park, and it gave her a turn."

"Ah! Things might be made of this," said the aspiring novelist.

"Fortunately," Elsie went on, "it seems that he did not see her."

"The Park would be a fine stage for a recognition-scene. 'It is—it is'—amid the tears of a sympathetic crowd—it is my long-lost husband! Behold that scar, inflicted, in our happy, happy days, by your own hand, and with the kitchen poker! At last you find me!"

"You forget," said the young lady without an

imagination, "that he must know where she is and all about her, because her photograph is in all the windows."

"To be sure. I forgot that. It must be a pleasing thing for a separated married man to be reminded of his bonds by every shop-window. I should walk in the Park—which, it seems, the gentleman was actually doing—so as to get out of the way of the photographs. I suppose Mr. Perigal does not know the cause of the separation?"

"No. She has never told anybody. No one knows her name, or anything about the marriage at all. Her husband, whoever he is, has never sent her any money or help: and at first, before she made a success, I think she was very poor at times. It seems cruel, when she is so beautiful, and so clever, and so much admired, and might marry well if she were free."

"Yes, it seems cruel. Still, she has the boy."

"Yes. The boy is to be sent to a public school, she says, because his father was there. And he is to go to Oxford afterwards, if he wishes. And then he is to go into the Army. So that we suppose his father was in the Army, too. As for the stage, it is not to be mentioned in his presence. And yet the child is a born actor, like his mother. But you don't care for this talk. Miss Violet Lovelace is nothing to you."

"On the contrary, Miss Violet Lovelace is a good deal to everybody who goes to the theatre, if it is only to the pit. You and I have often admired her extremely."

"You would laugh to see the love-letters and the bouquets she gets. Sometimes she shows them to me; sometimes she tosses them to Mr. Perigal, who puts them in the fire; and sometimes she gets angry with them, and tears them up in a rage. Now your pipe is finished, and perhaps you would like me to go. But if you like to have another, we can talk about Miss Virginie."

"Woman is a wheedler. You know I should like to have another pipe, and you know I like to talk about Virginie."

"She lives, does she not, in an enchanted island?"

"Yes; enchanted when she is on it. Formerly it was one of the Fortunate Islands. The shades of heroes used to haunt its woods and sit beside its waterfalls. I saw Ulysses there myself, once; but when I drew nearer, intending to have a talk over a few little things, he changed into an aged nigger with snow-white wool. But there is no doubt that the island was enchanted while Virginie lived there. Now that she has come to England the spell, I dare say, is removed. It cannot be anything more than a commonplace bit of an island, with ups and downs—which they call hills and ravines—and trees and rivers, and it smells all over of guano. I wonder anyone can go on living there. But no doubt they are all packing up to go away as fast as they can."

"And what sort of a Palace did she have?"

"The Palace was built entirely of jasper, malachite, white marble, and other precious materials, set with sapphires and pearls. It was crowded with works of art, especially in sculpture, and it was hung with rich tapestries and silken curtains; beautiful flowers stood about, and there were perfumed fountains, and always the sound of dropping music, and wonderful maidens, with lustrous eyes and long floating hair, dressed in amber silk of Greek fashion, to attend the Princess."

"How delightful! She was the Queen of the whole island, of course."

"Why, of course she was. Nothing else was possible. She ruled all hearts, and was, indeed, a most gracious monarch, the fountain of honour, and the dispenser of joy."

"And you were in love with her."

"That was not unusual; in fact, we were all in love with her. But Tom came first. I only came second."

"That horrid Tom!"

"Yes; I often regret that I never pushed Tom over the edge of the ravine. It might have been done so very easily, and the consequences to me would have been so delightful. Indeed, I was only restrained from doing so by the consideration that perhaps Virginie might have been annoyed, and one would not vex that divine creature even by a crumpled rose-leaf, to say nothing of a crumpled Tom."

"I see. Did she like being loved by everybody? Did it make her vain?"

"Vain? Are you aware that you are speaking of Virginie? Do you know that she is without any fault at all. My dear Elsie, you must not ask questions which betray ignorance so profound."

The girl laughed—

"Oh! it is delicious. And all about a woman!"

"Why—who should it be about, if not a woman?"

"To think that men can talk such extravagant nonsense, and, I suppose, believe it about any girls!"

"She is a goddess," said Percival. "Now, if there were no goddesses we should have to invent some. Do you see? Which things are an allegory?"

"No, I do not see. Cannot you be content with your Virginie as she is?"

"As she is," he replied; "there is no 'is.' You are to me—what I think you are. You are, to yourself—what you think you are. To your mother you are someone else. Virginie is to me—a goddess. What she is to other men doesn't matter."

"I like it," said Elsie, reflecting; "only it must make a girl ashamed of herself to be called a goddess, when she knows very well that she is just like other

people, and, I suppose, the best of girls sometimes feel that they ought to be better. Good-night, Mr. Percival. Go to bed and dream of your Enchanted Palace."

"Now, there is a girl," said Percival, slowly, as he prepared for going to bed, "who might make a man, in time, believe that there may be, after all, different kinds and degrees in goddess-ships. May be? There are—yet—oh! Virginie!"

CHAP. III.

AN ACTRESS AT HOME.

OBODY wanted a Miss or a Mistress to place before that illustrious name of Violet Lovelace; other people crave for titles; the more naked his name the better pleased

is the actor; he knows, you see, the difference between real and sham distinction. The young lady arrived at the highest honours of her profession by a single leap. When she began, when Guy Ferrier discovered her, she was only intrusted

with those parts which require little speaking, but a good deal of standing about on the stage. In one sense, therefore, she was, from the beginning, one of the brightest ornaments of the British Theatre, and, as one

of a group, she helped to form many most delightful pictures.

At the outset, she was quite an ignorant young lady, without very much ambition, and only half conscious of her good looks. If you are born in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane; if your papa is a "carpenter," using the word in its theatrical sense; if all your friends belong, somehow or other, to the "House," so that the children go on with the Pantomime as soon as they can wear a costume, and the grown-up ones are supers, unless they are ticket-takers, carpenters, door-keepers, dressers, and the rest of it; if the pavement of Russell-court, Duke's-court, and Vinegar-yard is your dancing-school; if your mother is a dresser at the theatre, and your cousins are ballet-girls, and your brothers also drop naturally into the service, you are also pretty certain to fall in with the stream, and regard the theatre in some form or other as offering you the only means of getting your daily bread.

It was Mr. Paul Perigal—"old" Paul Perigal; his earliest recollections of the stage are connected with the visit of the allied Sovereigns—who first found out Emily Hicks. Purely in the interest of the drama he kept an eye upon beauty or promise among the humbler children of Thespis. Emily lived close to the theatre. She went on at Christmas till she grew too big to go on any longer. Her mother proposed that she should follow her own line, which is safe, if not lucrative, and become a dresser. But Paul Perigal ordered otherwise. "Hicks," he said, to the carpenter, "you've got a girl who may be a flyer. I've observed her, Hicks. She will be, unless my experience deceives me, a beautiful woman. Your own experience of the stage, Hicks, will warrant you in agreeing with me that beauty is half the battle, because a girl can always be taught to stand and turn her eyes about and smile, even if she can't open her mouth to speak. But your girl is as sharp as a needle and as cheeky as a boy. Send her to me, Hicks, and I will do what I can for her."

Emily Hicks was not slow to recognise the fact that it is ten times more jolly to be dressed and to stand on the stage for the admiration of the world than to be hidden away behind for the purpose of dressing others. She also knew that she was frightfully ignorant of manners as well as of learning. And when she saw—which was every night—the stage ladies with their magnificent stage manners, she wondered whether she, too, would ever have to walk with that air to sweep back the skirts with gestures so splendid, to wear such frocks as if they belonged naturally to her. Now, in the eyes of such observers as Miss Emily Hicks, it is most true that "manners maketh the woman."

Paul Perigal took great pains with her. She was such a sharp, intelligent pupil that he began to conceive the greatest hopes of her. She had a voice of the kind which is good for a song on occasion, though not enough to make her a singer. He had the voice trained; then he had her taught to dance—perhaps she would become a burlesque actress; then he taught her to walk and to carry herself; then he taught her to read aloud, to speak without the use of Drury-lane colloquialisms; then he persuaded her father to let her live with him



entirely, with the view of separating her from those young friends whose acquaintance in after life might not be desirable. And when all was done, and the sharp-faced, cheeky child of Duke's-court had become in two or three years transformed into an extremely beautiful girl of seventeen, thus trained and drilled, the worthy old actor began to instruct her in the real craft and mystery of the dramatic art.

From such small beginnings sprang the greatness of Violet Lovelace.

She was on the stage in that small way already described for a few months only. Then she left it to marry a man who was madly in love with her: a young man, a handsome man, a man in the army, a man like a hero of romance for dark eyes and dark hair, a man—oh!—who was going some day to have a title. The last fact was her own secret, never revealed to her father or to Paul Perigal.

Paul heard of the intended marriage with a groan of disappointment. He hoped for so much from this girl, who was so clever. Now she was going to marry a swell, and his labour of four years would be lost. Never, never again could he hope to find a pupil so promising. His professional reputation was staked upon her success. He allowed her, he told everybody, to go on in small parts only in order to give her confidence; but wait—wait a bit—she would make the finest Lady Teazle ever seen on the stage; as Rosamond she would make an epoch; as Juliet she would be incomparable. He boasted about her at Rockley's: "A gem of the first water, gentlemen; the very first water. I shall be content, for my own part, with the immortality which will be my lot, not as an actor, though, perhaps, memories may survive—I say nothing, but a certain Mercutio of the year 1836 is quoted still—thank you, gentlemen—but I shall not be remembered so much as an actor, but as the happy finder, developer, and instructor of this light in Histrionic Art." And now this gem was lost, wrested from him, and to be lost to the drama. Pity! pity! a thousand pities!

What, however, Paul Perigal did not foresee, and could not possibly foresee, was the return of the deserter (who looked pale and worn, but resolute), which took place within a year of her marriage, and her announcement that she was ready to take up her old work, and to devote herself with it. She further informed her tutor that no questions were to be asked about her husband, who was a Wretch worthy of the greater condemnation. Then she asked Paul what he thought of the baby, who was wonderful for six weeks old; and then she said that she was ready to begin at once.

"I don't wish to put impertinent questions, my dear," said Paul, tearfully, because the divided emotions of joy at her return to Art, and of sympathy with her wrecked married life, brought those signs of sympathy to his good old eyes. "But I should like to ask one, if I might."

"Can't tell, Daddy," she replied, in something of her old defiant way. But she looked as if, at touch or word, she, too, might "go off." "Can't tell till I hear it."

"Only this, my dear," he said. "I did my best to make you a lady."

"You did—bless your dear old heart!"

"But, you know, my experience extended to ladies on the stage, and—in point of fact—not those who have played leading parts. I don't think, for instance, that I ever saw a Juliet of the Lane at her own house. And as for Society ladies—ladies in the front—of course I never knew any. Oh! I know it's getting different with the young fellows now. But I'm old, and I understand my position, which is more on the level of the Nurse or Lady Capulet than with Juliet. So that, you see, I've been at times fearful lest, when you went into marble halls and gilded saloons, people might have wondered who you were. Because your manners might not, perhaps, be quite the same as theirs. Don't think me rude, my dear."

"Don't be afraid, Daddy. I never had any opportunity of showing any manners. Because I have never seen a lady, or a gentleman either, since I went away. Amy Robsart, bless you, was nothing to it. And I believe if my lord and master had been able to make that little trap in the staircase without being found out he would have done it, and I should have gone into it—flop: and there would have been an end of one. Of course I only waited till the boy was born to come away. And, of course, he didn't want the boy at all. I've been locked up since the wedding because he's ashamed of his wife, and he wishes she was dead."

"Never mind asking any more questions, Daddy. I mean to live, not to die; and the boy shall live too. And now that is settled let me get to work. No more standing with one knee bent and a sweet smile—like that—if you please. I must have a country engagement for leading parts; and then I must come to town. Go to Rockley's, and tell them I've come back. You may gas as much as you like about talent and beauty and such. I'll have my photograph taken again—you don't think I'm going off, do you?—and with your help, you dear old Daddy, we'll pull 'em in and make some money."

She went into a country troupe and travelled for three years and more, patient, working hard, studying every morning with Paul, and never neglecting the boy.

Then she came to town and made her first appearance in a new comedy, which would certainly have been a failure but for her acting and her extraordinary beauty. The unforced merriment, the pathos, the ease of the new

actress startled and arrested the people. It was a great success, and Violet's fortune was made.

The first thing she did was to advertise for a real lady to take daily care of her boy, now five years old and no longer a baby.

Elsie was the real lady. Violet chose her from a good many applicants on account of her quiet manner and trustworthy face.

"Some of them were dressed better," she explained, "and some of them pretended to know more, and some of them wanted to teach the boy on a system. Most of them looked as if they would probably beat and pinch the boy when I was out of sight. In that case I should have had to beat them, which they would not like, and there would have been rows. But this girl I am sure won't beat him. I told her I wanted a lady, and she blushed very prettily—Daddy, if only one could blush on the stage!—because, I suppose, nobody had ever doubted that she was a lady; not a stalls lady, or a private-box lady, but an upper-circle-at-four-shillings-reserved lady, who comes to the theatre by Underground, and is not ashamed to cry and laugh; father something respectable, I suppose, with a shop somewhere—what does it matter? She said that she would do her best for the child if I would let her take him; and she spoke so prettily—don't you think I might find a part for this style of thing? Look, Daddy"—here she drooped her eyes a little, made her face a little longer, just smoothed her hair, folded her hands, and lowered her voice, and became immediately Elsie. "That kind of thing. I believe it would take, if the people got to understand it at once. But I want an author—oh! I want an author badly."

"But about the governess?"

"Oh! yes—well—you know she is quite young, and I am four-and-twenty, and I feel ever so old." Violet was given to mix up things so that it is not always easy to follow her line of thought. What she meant, however, was that she was old enough to read character and to enact the part of a patron. "So I just kissed her and told her to come every day, and that I was going to be a real lady sometime—in fact, that I am always understudying the part; but that at present I was a great stage lady, and so on, and so on. And here we are, and here she is, Daddy—and I feel that so respectable a young lady confers dignity upon the house. You are not to bring any more people from Rockley's here, if you please; the place will have to be as demure as the Foundling Hospital, and if you and I do sometimes have a little supper with a few noble patrons of the drama, we must have it out of the house in future."

"Very well, Violet," said Paul. "Do you think the young lady, at odd moments, would like a little instruction in the—"

"You dear old man!" She threw her arms round his neck and gave him a stage kiss, which everybody knows is done without impressing the lips upon the cheek or brow at all. But she disarranged his wig. "I believe you would like the whole world to go on the stage."

"All the world's"—

"Don't, Paul. And let Elsie alone—she is to be my governess, not my rival. I should like," said the actress, proudly, "to see the woman who will be my rival, in a year or two. And now, Daddy, one more trial of that scene. Come! But I must find an author."

It was this assumption of the "real lady" which preyed upon poor Elsie's mind. Not that it entered Violet's busy head to ask who or what her father was. She was profoundly ignorant of the world outside the stage. Whether she was told that Elsie was the daughter of a Bishop or of a City clerk, she would not have suspected any difference. One sometimes gets glimpses of this ignorance of humanity's cherished social differences. Everything depends on rank, even in the most Radical and Republican countries; and rank is a thing of so much delicacy, so many shades, that only one born in the middle of it all can truly understand it—can at once feel the true awe for those above him, and the true contempt for those below. This is an advantage possessed by the middle-class man, which has never before been set forth. Violet, you see, was born too low down. In her early days, everybody with a black coat seemed to her a swell, and everybody in kid gloves seemed a lady. This kind of ignorance sticks in a surprising manner, so that you may detect the high-born aristocrat, however he may dissemble, by his not understanding why the solicitor and the general practitioner do not always stand upon the same level, and why the ladies of both decline to call upon the eminent draper's wife.

After a separation of five years the sight of her husband was to Violet the revival of old bitternesses that she had thought forgotten and clean passed away for ever. But you cannot so put things away and lock them up. Nothing is ever really forgotten so that you are quite safe that it will never come back to you. The sight of the man's face brought back to her recollection her foolish belief in him, her trust in his loyalty, her dreadful disappointment in him, the cruel things he had said, his selfishness, his shame of her, so that he kept her a prisoner and would neither let her go anywhere nor bring any of his friends to see her. No one should know, he told her, that he had been such a fool. No one should even guess that he had a wife. When she left him it was with a letter telling him where she was going and what she was going to do. They were to be henceforth as if they had

never met: but, for the sake of the boy, she would preserve her marriage lines.

"Daddy," she asked, "could that man take away the boy?"

"I don't think he could."

"If he were to try," she said, with a glitter in her eye, "I would stab him. Did you see him, yesterday; how he looked in the face of the girl he was riding with? That way he used to look at me. Sorrow, and trouble, for any woman who falls in the way of such a man."

"There are laws about married people," Paul went on; "but I don't know exactly what they are, because I never, somehow, thought about marrying till it was too late. Much better, for an old man like me, to have a young daughter than a young wife about him. No wife could be so pretty, and bright, and clever, as you—and always in good temper!"

"Not always, Daddy; not when she meets her Wretch of a husband."

"If I had a wife she would only be disturbing my ease. Well, my dear, I don't know what the laws are. But I believe that whatever you earn, he can take, unless there's been some sort of a legal separation. All that you have is his, you see; and I suppose that all he has is yours, too."

"I don't think," said Violet, laughing rather grimly, "that he is likely to go to the treasury on Saturday morning; and he won't want the furniture. Besides, that is yours."

"We will say so to keep it from him. But it was bought with your money."

In fact, Violet had displaced all the dingy old sticks and refurbished the house with bright new things of the most modern fashion; so that the place, though Bloomsbury is not one of the most cheerful and sunny parts of London, was pleasant to look upon.

"It is the boy, Daddy, that I am thinking of. Always the boy. I am sure he hates the boy; he would do the boy a mischief if he could. Because, you see, the boy is his heir."

"If he hates the boy, he can leave his money to someone else."

"It isn't only money, Daddy. It is land, and . . . and other things that he can't leave."

"He shall only harm the boy," said Paul, fiercely, "by passing over my mangled corpse."

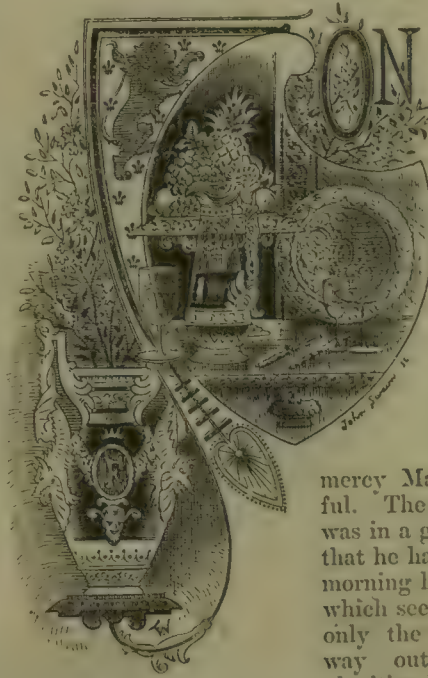
"Thank you, Daddy, dear. I know your fidelity, and I will bring you home a property sabre, one of the sort with a curly blade, you know. But that won't be the way. Oh! Daddy, I am going to have trouble. He will come to see me."

"Courage, Violet. He can do nothing."

"And I can do a great deal. Because he is afraid of me. Patience—patience—Daddy mine."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ONLY WAY OUT OF IT.



that night Virginia dined with her cousins. No one was at the dinner except Mrs. Hallows and Guy, who was for once in a good temper, and actually did something towards promoting the cheerfulness of the evening.

For this small mercy Maude was grateful. The reason why he was in a good temper was that he had only that very morning hit upon an idea which seemed to him not only the most excellent way out of his perplexities, but also the only

way out. Because he was now perfectly assured that unless he married an heiress there was nothing more that he could do to avert the crash. And because that idea seemed good in his own ideas, he saw a hundred reasons why it would seem good in the eyes of the other person chiefly concerned with it.

The idea was the following:—

On arriving in London he realised, principally through the photograph shops, the truth of his wife's statement that she, the woman whom he regarded with so lively a detestation, had become, almost at one step, one of the most popular actresses of the day. For her face greeted him with smiling eyes from every bookseller's shop, from every photographer's, and from every stationer's. Violet Lovelace was before him everywhere. He could buy her picture showing full face, three-quarter face, side face; he could buy her looking into a glass, tying a hood round her head, gazing heavenwards, in riding habit, in her favourite character, seated, standing, kneeling. After the first shock he cared very little about it, and ceased to be irritated by the sight of a woman he would fain have





R. C. WOODVILLE, DEL.

forgotten. She had succeeded. Very well; let her succeed, so long as she kept her secret. It was not until that very morning that he began to think how this very success, instead of being a danger to him, might actually be of the greatest use. It wanted only a little—a little . . . well . . . a little absence of scruple; and if he found, for his own part, that he could contribute, so to speak, this absence of scruple, why was it to be supposed that she, on the other side, who had as much to gain, would show herself troubled with qualms of conscience? For the plan which he had formed in his own mind was nothing but this—why not agree with the actress to break off suddenly, and say no more about the bond which tied them together? All they had to do was to go on as if nothing had ever happened at all. Such simplicity in the idea! Such a swift and sudden cutting of a Gordian Knot!

He considered the subject dispassionately, as he thought. That is to say, he lay back in his chair, and followed in imagination the various advantages of the plan.

She was still young; she was—well, perhaps, she still thought herself beautiful; how could he have ever been charmed by the beauty of which men raved? She was clever, they said; certainly in the old times her tongue was free and her temper sharp; she had always a little court of admirers about her; half the men in London were languishing for her; a great crowd gathered round the stage-door every night to see her drive away; Princes went to her theatre and applauded; the men at his club talked about her; she was inaccessible; she was guarded by old Paul Perigal, whom she called Daddy; she lived a quiet and blameless life. Why, such a woman, said Guy, has excellent chances: she may marry anybody—really, anybody; she has only to be careful of her reputation. Would it not be best—say as a calm, cold matter of business—to agree together that this business, a most awful nuisance to both of them, should be terminated? It wanted nothing but common consent, and silence afterwards.

Best? Why, it was the only thing to be done—the only possible thing. To go on as they were all their lives: thus to be tied and yet to be kept apart: could anything be more foolish? If it was a good thing for himself it was surely a far better thing for her: so good a thing was it for her that he hesitated whether he should



"As these three rode in the Row, there were many who recognised them."

do the woman so kind a turn. Certainly, he thought, taking the mental attitude such a man always assumes, she had behaved infernally badly to himself, and deserved nothing at his hands. Yet, considering how greatly his own interests were concerned in the matter, he would go and see her, and make her, by word of mouth, a definite offer of release. How happy she would be to have her freedom! How cleverly she had played her cards so that, with Daddy always at her side, her reputation was blameless! Yes; he would let her marry when and where she pleased. Benevolent young man! Most unselfish of young men! And then, when she was out of the way, he could marry his cousin—and her dot. At the mere thought of that pile of money his fancy lightly turned to green meadows, green pastures, green lawns, as large as tables, with shepherds sitting around, and the click of coin and the voice of him who held the bank, and the fierce joy of him who won and the breathless expectations of him who waited the event.

Lord Ferrier sat with Mrs. Hallows on his right:

she told him stories and amused him; and with Virginia on his left. It pleased him, though he hardly knew why, to know that this beautiful creature regarded him with so much respect: he liked her to ask him questions, to venture timidly on showing a return of the affection which he bestowed upon her; he referred things to her, asked her opinions, proposed plans for her, and gave her presents. He courted her, as Maude courted her, but unconsciously, for his son. It was for his sake, not for his own, that Virginia would accept the offer of her cousin.

Nothing would have been more pleasant than this little dinner *en famille*. To Virginia its chief charm was the beauty and fitness of its setting. Mrs. Hallows had everything, without doubt, as it ought to be. Her furniture was of the most modern fashion; her decorations of the most approved type; the house was spacious and new; but her rooms lacked something. You cannot add the charm which lies in old furniture, old pictures, old bric-à-brac, all belonging to each other. Mrs. Hallows had large rooms, and spacious; and these were small. The things in her house were good, but they were new. Here the plate was old, the furniture was old, the pictures were old; there was an old-fashioned air about the whole, far more pleasing than anything of the newest fashion. And at his end of the table sat the chief, old himself, yet in the most beautiful and picturesque time of man's life—the time of autumn, the age of stateliness and dignity,

not of decrepitude. Maude herself, with her thin, pale cheeks and lustrous eyes, her dress of black velvet, with a diamond cross, looked in her place as doing duty for the Châtellaine. A quiet, easy dinner, in which every one felt that in a home dinner conversation need not be forced. Maude saw her brother looking at the girl she wanted him to marry with eyes that seemed full of admiration. At last, she thought, even his cold heart was moved. He was moved—a little—as much as his anxieties allowed him to be moved—as much as any woman could then have moved him. The prospect of release removed a load of those anxieties. The thought that his sister expected him to propose to the girl immediately, and the satisfaction of considering that he might really be free and able to take that step, made him regard her more curiously. Yes, she was certainly a very pretty girl, and of a type not common in these realms. As Maude watched him she thought, but only for a moment—because it was but a wild hope, a hopeless hope—that perhaps his

affections might be fixed, and the attractions of the green table be forgotten. But she was too sensible to dwell upon this happiness. She knew, from long and patient study of her brother, that his case was really as hopeless as the case of an habitual drunkard. He would have his vicissitudes. With money to spare, he might run on for years; but, in the long run, the end was certain. All that could be lost would be lost. Yet, with this absolute certainty of knowledge, she would not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice the innocent and truthful girl who believed all she was told, and suspected no motive. If the evil time must come, let it be put off as long as possible; perhaps it might not come till he who would feel it most would know it and feel it no more.

"Guy," said Lord Ferrier, when they were alone, "your cousin is a very charming girl."

"Yes, Sir, she is very charming."

"And very beautiful."

"She is very beautiful."

"Is she . . . has she any entanglement?"

"I believe, Sir, she has none."

Lord Ferrier looked about him, and stroked his chin, reflectively.

"Then, Guy," he said, "we will go up stairs."

The three ladies were sitting together. Mrs. Hallows presently rose and began talking to Lord Ferrier. Maude went to the piano and began to play something. Guy sat down beside Virginia. Perhaps it was the soft atmosphere of the room; perhaps the wine he had been drinking; perhaps the sense of freedom gained by his newly-conceived idea; perhaps the words of his father—which made his heart feel an unwonted glow as he looked upon the girl whose fortune would make all things right for him.

"You are looking, Mrs. Hallows," said his Lordship, "at one of my pictures"—it represented a girl in a field; and Mrs. Hallows was wondering, before she burst into admiration, whether it was meant for a gipsy, or perhaps an Indian woman, or a Nymph, or a brown fairy. "My daughter when at the age of fifteen. Thank you, yes; it is admitted to be a speaking likeness. Yet the Academy refused it. You see," he added, with a smile, "they will not allow a man who has a title to paint. We must not touch things professional."

"Is it possible?" cried Mrs. Hallows, who knew almost as much about Art as poor Virginia. "Is it possible? The most delicately-painted, the most striking likeness."

Virginia was sitting in an easy-chair, beside a lamp covered with a soft, warm shade, whose colour was reflected on her cheek; other lamps with soft shades were standing about the room, so that it glowed with a soft subdued light: she held a fan in her hand: her eyes were soft and dreamy: she was listening to the soft and dreamy music.

Maude went on playing, and watched with keen and anxious eyes. So far all was well: her brother, for the first time in her experience, seemed attracted: she played more softly—more dreamily: in the old, old days, when he was a lad fresh from Eton, and still open to sweet influences, this dreamy music would make him sit listening as long as she chose to play. The thoughts of a boy are long, long thoughts; and now he was a man, with hardened heart, and the old innocence was gone: but yet the music touched him.

Yet not as it had done formerly, when it roused his mind for a moment to noble ambitions. Now it fell upon his soul as some potent drug mounts to the brain, and makes a man see things which exist not and believe things impossible to be real. His freedom was already achieved—somehow: he was actually free—in imagination. The "other one" had actually accepted her discharge—in his imagination.

He was able to do—under these happy circumstances—what his sister wanted him to do. He would make her happy: he would make his cousin happy: he would make his father happy. Everybody should be happy, till the money was all gone. He put the thing to himself in this lively benevolent way, as if it was a duty closely connected with the fifth commandment.

"Virginia," he whispered.

She blushed. It was the first time that her cousin had addressed her by her Christian name.

"Virginia," he repeated, gently. "I have said that he had a low, rich voice."

Maude heard. She saw her brother's bending head and her cousin's blushing cheeks; and she went on playing more softly, more dreamily, as if her very soul were wrapped and lapped in the melody.

"May I see you alone?" he asked. "Virginia, my happiness is at stake."

His own happiness, of course. After all, you can't ask a girl to marry you on the ground that it will make her happy. Less selfish men than Guy approach this delicate subject in the same manner.

"My happiness is at stake," he repeated, feeling quite sure that the magnitude of the interests involved would not fail of moving any woman's heart.

She made no reply. Maude, watching, saw how her colour came and went.

Then Lord Ferrier stepped to her, and interrupted the conversation.

"Will you sing to me, my dear?" he said. "Will you sing me one of your little French songs?"

"If that will give you any pleasure, my Lord."

"All that you do, fair cousin, gives me pleasure. You are born under a happy star, to give nothing but pleasure to all who love you, my dear."

She smiled, and sang her song. Guy stood by her. When she finished, he whispered again, "Let me see you alone. Let me call upon you to-morrow. You will see me alone?"

"I will try," she said, blushing.

Mrs. Hallows had other engagements for the evening; but when they came away, Virginia requested to be set down at home. She had a headache; she wanted to be alone.

"My dear," said her guardian, "Captain Ferrier asked me to-night to allow him to see you to-morrow alone. I told him that I could not possibly make any objection. But your decision is in your own hands, Virginia. Shall I say anything for it—or against it?"

"Oh! no—no!" she replied; "only . . . it seems so sudden . . . and what will Captain Kemyss say? and my mother? and Tom?"

"If Tom is a good brother," said Mrs. Hallows, "he will be rejoiced. Captain Kemyss is a sensible man. Of course he will be rejoiced. And as for your mother, why, my dear, can it be possible that she would not rejoice at your marriage with the heir, who will some day be the head of the House, the future Lord Ferrier? Ask your heart, my dear, and leave the rest to me."

"I ask my heart in vain," said the girl, half laughing, half sighing; "for I get no reply."

"You do not dislike him?"

"Oh! no—no. How can I dislike a man so good and noble as Guy?"

Mrs. Hallows said nothing for a while. She was, in fact, lost in natural admiration of Maude's great cleverness, because she had, for her own part, looked in vain for the least sign of this great nobility; Maude had filled this young person's mind with a romantic and impossible conception of her brother's character. Nevertheless, if the end was good, what matter for the means? Besides, is there any romance which lasts beyond the fourth week of the honeymoon?

"If you do not dislike him, my dear child, the way is already paved for love. But, indeed, I would not seek to persuade you. Ask, I say again, your own heart."

All night long, Virginia lay tossing, disquiet, anxious. If she dropped asleep, dreadful dreams came to her. She was back at Mon Désir. Tom looked at her with reproachful eyes; the Professor held up hands at her and turned away in despair, reminding her that he had always loved her, and expected to be considered, after Tom; even Captain Kemyss, when he saw her coming slowly up the avenue of palms, dropped his face in his hands, as if he were ashamed of her.

But why? For surely it was a great thing for her, and a thing which her father would have liked; and Captain Ferrier was the best of men, although of such sensitive and highly strung nature; and perhaps it would please Lord Ferrier; and Maude would like it; and Mrs. Hallows would like it. And yet—and yet—some fear, some regret, some disappointment in her mind. And when she rose on the morning which was to be that of her betrothal it was with red eyes and a heavy heart.

"Guy," Maude whispered before they parted, "What did you say to Virginia to-night?"

"I could not say much with all of you in the room. What I am to say to-morrow will please you, Maude."

"I hope it will please her."

"I suppose it will. Why shouldn't it? Most girls like to marry an eldest son. Besides . . . Oh! of course it will please her."

"And then . . . Guy . . . Guy . . . Remember, a wife is not a sister." The tears came into her eyes. . . .

"If you make her unhappy—as you have made me unhappy—I shall never forget that, if I had told her the truth, she would rather die than marry you. Yet, if not for you, for my father's sake I would do it again, whatever the consequences. I would rather that Virginia were unhappy than that his last years should be disgraced."

"Thank you, Maude. You are a kind and loving sister. You always contrive to say such pleasant things when a man has gone out of his way to please you."

"I say the truth to you, now and then, because I cannot help it, I suppose. Good-night, Guy! You have got all my little fortune; you have got all the money you can raise on your reversionary interests; you are loaded and crushed with debts; you have gambled everything away. There is this one chance left you—a sweet and true-hearted girl, who will love you for yourself if you show her a grain of sympathy, and who will bring you a fortune that will set you up for life, unless you throw that away as well. But I know—oh! I know—what will be the end of it. It is all I can do for you, Guy; your last chance—your last chance. And God forgive you if . . ." Her voice broke, and she left him.

Guy looked after her angrily.

"What the devil," he said, "has come to Maude to-night? As for Virginia"—

Then he thought of the money-bags, and that sweet vision of green cloth floated before his eyes, and he smiled. What mattered Maude's anger or Virginia's happiness, compared with the glorious fight with chance lying almost within his grasp? He went to his club, and drank a brandy-and-soda. Then he remembered

the interview which he must have, some time, with his wife. His conscience was pretty well dead within him; but yet he did seem to remember that there was an ugly word in three syllables which stood for a certain unlawful thing, only possible to be committed by men already once married. But, then!—pah!—absurd! Violet would be only too glad to accept her release.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENGAGEMENT.



IN the morning Captain Ferrier made a mistake which is common, indeed, but always fatal—that is to say, he put the cart before the horse. In other words, he reckoned his chickens before they were hatched. To be more precise, because he wanted a thing to happen he supposed that it was going to happen, even though rivers would have to run up hills and rain to fall out of cloudless skies. To be intelligible to the meanest comprehension, he neglected to follow an old precept, designed for such as himself, which teaches that it is well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new. Bluebeard owed the greatest successes of his romantic career to remembering this proverb, which Captain Ferrier forgot. To come to facts, he called upon Virginia before he called upon Violet. Now, it was most essential for the successful conduct of his case that the latter should fall in with his views and be a consenting party to that ugly word of six letters and three syllables.

Virginia received him with a conscious blush, because, of course, she knew well what he came to say. She was still actively engaged in following Mrs. Hallows's advice—namely, in asking her own heart. Nothing is more difficult to do, when you come to try it. For, first, how are you to put your questions? What questions are you to put? And suppose you get no answer—what are you to do next? This was exactly poor Virginia's case. She wanted to find out how she should like to marry her cousin, and she could not get the least glimpse or foreshadowing of what would happen, or how things might be, either towards happiness or repentance in the future. Nor could she understand herself as Guy Ferrier's daily companion. If she had been older, more experienced, a reader of novels or of poetry, she would have understood perfectly well that there was no fluttering of her heart at the prospect before her, and that she cared nothing at all about the man, but only respected an ideal. Also she would have understood that what Mrs. Hallows and ladies like unto her mean by the phrase of asking one's heart is to be interpreted in the sense of "consider the establishment and the position." But this she did not understand, and it would have been incredible to her that her cousin, this soul of honour and fine feeling, could esteem her fortune as of the least importance in asking her to be his wife. She was as yet little more than a child in experience, though eighteen years of age: she knew nothing more of society than she had learned from four months with Mrs. Hallows, and even that lady knew nothing about the personal character of Captain Ferrier. To be sure, the personal character of the heir to a peerage must be very, very bad to form an obstacle to marriage; yet there are some vices, of which the inveterate vice of gambling is one, which cannot be overlooked even by women of the world. English girls teach each other and learn from books and the talk of their elders the true meaning, the proportion, the value of things, especially of money and rank, concerning which no "class of persons" can be said to feel more strongly or to distinguish more correctly. But who was to teach this young colonial that nothing is what it seems to be, and that we build our social structure on make-believe and assumption?

In one of the queer, wild *desréglés* romances of the last century, when the French, like the Russians of the present day, were busy tearing every social institution up by the roots to see whether it would not grow equally well with the roots and the head down, there was a certain ingenious Abbé, who wrote the history of a young lady brought up in a single room, and introduced to the outside world after she arrived at years of womanhood. Naturally, she took a new, original, and quite unconventional view of the things which she saw. Virginia was in something of the same condition as the young lady brought up in the box. She believed what she was told, and what she saw. Therefore, when Maude told her how great and good and generous a man was her only brother, she naturally accepted the assurance, and wondered where so admirable a man would find a wife worthy of him. That she herself would be asked to occupy that position was, indeed, most amazing. And now he stood before her; he bent over her; he whispered in his low, full voice, which really sounded as if he was full of feeling.

"Virginia! you know why I am here. Will you bid me hope?"

She made no reply, because she did not know what to say.

"It is for my own happiness." These were the same words he had used last night; and it did seem to Virginie, even at that moment, as if, at such a moment, there was more to be considered than her suitor's happiness.

Still she made no reply.

"My sister, Maude, will be pleased, I know. My father will be pleased, I am sure. Virginie, give me your hand."

He took it. He held it. Then he stooped and kissed her forehead. She had said nothing; not one word; but she was engaged.

Her lover dropped her hand and walked to the window, with a sigh. Why did he sigh? He stayed there for a few minutes without saying anything. Then he came back, and sat beside her.

He spoke slowly, and said little, and that little was strange. It was an arrangement, he repeated, in cold and measured words, that would be satisfactory to all concerned. It was necessary for him to marry; it was pleasant to marry his cousin; they would have an early day fixed; his father would, perhaps, be the best person to write to Captain Kemys, and she should write to her mother, and perhaps she would tell Mrs. Hallows, and so they could all go on just the same as before. "Of course," he said, "I shall be delighted to do anything for you that I possibly can. You will, I know, command me. But about balls and evening-parties"—

"Oh! I do not want you to go anywhere unless you like."

"Thank you. I am not fond of these social things. You greatly relieve me. It is very good of you." He spoke with an approach to feeling. "I always think that a pair of people who are going to be married look absurd going about together. So glad that you agree with me."

Then he rose, and said that he believed there was no more to be said, and he kissed her again on the forehead and went away.

Poor Virginie had no experience in love-making, and had read few novels; but she had looked for the display of more feeling. Still, a man of Guy's refinement was not to be expected to make boisterous love, like a common rustic and an ungoverned person. Perhaps, however, he would say more when he recovered from the emotion under which he had been labouring—that sigh!—and when she herself recovered from her fright.

Then Mrs. Hallows came into the room and asked her, with a smile, if she had seen Captain Ferrier, and then kissed her, and congratulated her, and told her that she was a girl greatly to be envied, and that her own fortune, added to her lover's position, ought to enable her to take any place—any place she pleased—in Society. "And then, my dear," she said, "you will remember me, and ask me to your very best parties."

The happy lover went straight to his sister. He was feeling, in fact, pretty low about the thing he had done. Still, there was no cause for anxiety: not the least. The other person would be rejoiced to meet him half way. But he rather began to wish that he had paid the less pleasant visit first.

"I've done it, Maude," he said, in deep and sepulchral tones.

"Done it! You mean that you have actually"—

"Yes. I'm engaged to the Creole girl. That's what I mean."

"Oh! Guy. I am so happy and thankful. But why are you looking gloomy over it?"

"Because I feel gloomy."

"I suppose I am a fool; but I confess I cannot sympathise with you, my brother."

"No. I did not suppose you would."

"It can't be money at such a moment."

"It isn't money. It's worse than money, perhaps. Oh! Maude"—Here he stopped. "No. Now I'm engaged," he added, more lightly, "I shall go round and tell them all to wait."

"There is no one—is there"—Maude asked suspiciously, "that you would rather marry? You are not in love, somewhere else, are you, Guy?"

"In love! Women are always thinking of love. No; there is no one else I would rather marry. Come, Maude, never mind. Be pleased because you've got what you wanted, and I shall have the money—with the wife. Pity I can't borrow it of her, and let her marry some one else."

"Do you happen to know—but, of course, you could not ask her—how it is settled?"

"I don't know. I suppose I shall get the spending of it, somehow, whichever way it is settled."

"I asked Mrs. Hallows once, but she does not know. Nor does she know how much it is. There is a charge on the estate for the mother for life; that is all she knows. Well, Guy"—she heaved a great sigh—"you will have it, whatever the amount is; but I hope, I sincerely hope, that it is all tied up and settled upon her, so that she cannot even sell out."

"No one loses who can hold on," said Guy, gravely. "The devil of it is having to leave off just when your luck is on the turn. Don't be afraid, Maude. I shall do very well. Will you tell my father, or shall I?"

"Do you tell him, Guy. He will be greatly pleased, I am sure. Go now and tell him; and, for Heaven's sake, my dear boy, try not to look as if you were going to be hanged."

"I wonder," said Maude to herself. "I wonder what it is—who it is. He says there is nobody he would rather marry. At one time I was afraid he might have got himself entangled. But it can't be that. Why has he always set his face against marriage? And shall—oh! shall I—get my jewels back?"

No; she will never get her jewels back, because now she has found out why Guy's engagement oppressed him with so profound a gloom.

Lord Ferrier was, indeed, greatly pleased. Nothing that his son had done pleased him so much. Indeed, the contemplation of his successor's career so far gave him little cause for gratification, although he knew nothing of the quagmire of debts, liabilities, money raised on reversionary interests and post obits in which Guy was plunged.

"I congratulate you," he said, "on your good taste and good judgment. Virginie is a most charming girl. I shall go this afternoon to tell her so, and to thank her for giving you her hand. Her fortune is considerable, and, properly husbanded, may help to win back some of our lost acres. You must regard it as a trust for that purpose, Guy. Think of your successors."

"I will, Sir," said Guy, with conviction.

"I suppose that there is no need to hurry the wedding. We must first get the consent of her mother and her guardian, Captain Kemys. It is now June. It will take two months or so to get their reply, which we may understand will be favourable. Let us hold the wedding in September, if that will do for everybody; and, considering that Virginie is already a daughter of the house, I think, Guy, that we should celebrate the event at The Towers. But all shall be as she wishes; all as she wishes."

The old man began to make plans for the happiness of the young pair. They should live at The Towers, if they pleased; he wanted nothing but bachelor's quarters there: they could have the town house where they pleased, and so on.

"And Guy, now that you are engaged, I think you should send in your papers. You have had nearly ten years' soldiering, which is five more than my allowance. A country gentleman owes duties to his country; and, if I were you, I would take up politics. Your wife, with her wonderful beauty and her manner, which is charming, is fitted to become a leader of society. She might even become to the Conservative cause what Lady Palmerston was to the Liberals. She should be of the greatest help to you, if you care for a political career. And why not, Guy? Why not? Surely there never was a time when there was a better opening for a man of ability. Think it over."

"I will, Sir," said Guy. "I will think it over."

He went away, and his father fell to building castles in the air, based on the many virtues of his promised daughter-in-law. Then Maude came, and they talked together about it, and how wonderfully things had turned out as they wished, and what a remarkable Providence it was that a bride and a fortune should be found for Guy in so forgotten and obscure a place as Palmiste Island.

"Let the fortune be tied up," said Maude, anxiously, "so that Guy cannot touch any of it, or dispose of it."

"By all means," her father replied. "Yet I like a wife to show some trust in her husband. All these arrangements should be left to her guardian. We will go and see Mrs. Hallows this afternoon, Maude. Of course, you will be gracious to her. I have observed that you have always been kind to her. Perhaps with a view—Maude, is every woman a match-maker? We will go this afternoon, and we will bring gifts. I shall give her one of my pictures—the Joan of Arc, I think, or the Mary Queen of Scots. And we will find something pretty among the old gimcracks: something belonging to your great grandmother, who was also her own. That she will value much better than if we bought her some new trinket in Bond-street. Come, Maude, let us go and turn over some of the pretty things."

Thus was Virginie engaged: thus was she welcomed as a daughter by the old Lord and a sister by Maude. They all dined with Mrs. Hallows that evening. Guy was still silent and preoccupied, thinking over his great and singular happiness, no doubt. Virginie looked in vain for any words of the deeper heart, because none came at all. And even Mrs. Hallows thought, though she said nothing, that a little attention was due from the young man to his fiancée; and that Captain Ferrier seemed certainly the coldest lover she had ever heard of. But Lord Ferrier saw nothing of this: he was the lover: he made Virginie sit beside him and held her hand in his, and stroked her hair, and whispered how happy she would make him in becoming his daughter, and what a lucky man was his son.

CHAPTER VI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

The interview with Violet must be held sooner or later, because, from the very nature of the things to be said, they could not possibly be written. One may have no conscience—many men certainly have no conscience; but few men are destitute of common sense, and there is generally some caution in wickedness. Again, to put down in black and white—which may be read by anybody—an offer to your wife that she may, if she please, go and marry some one else, provided you are allowed the

same liberty, would be, besides a very imprudent thing, a thing which might go straight to the head, and lead to repentance before the deed. This kind of repentance is regrettable, because it sometimes ends in preventing the crime altogether. Yet one wonders why it has not been preached up more. Again, if you go and make such an offer in words, you may be able to dress it up in flowers and figures of fancy, so that by persuasive art its great wickedness may be concealed, and its general advantages alone remain in sight. Now, the general advantages of a clean state are obvious to all.

Guy knew his wife's address, because it was the old one. He knew that she still lived with Paul Perigal, as she had done in former days. He called at the house the next morning at twelve. Miss Lovelace was not returned from the theatre; he would wait for her. No; he would not give his card. Miss Lovelace would see him when she came home.

He walked up stairs with the air of a man who knew his way about the house, and went into the drawing-room.

A young lady—rather a pretty girl—rose as he came in.

"Pardon me," said Guy, astonished; "I am waiting to see Miss Lovelace."

The girl gathered up some work.

"I will tell her," she said. "Perhaps she will not be home for half an hour. But Mr. Perigal will be back immediately."

"I do not want to see Mr. Perigal at all," said Guy, rudely. "May I ask, if you please, who you are?"

"I am the boy's governess and companion"—it was, in fact, Elsie; "and at present he is asleep."

And then she knew, by the change in her visitor's face and the sudden look of resemblance, to whom she was talking.

"I will go," she said, hastily; and fairly ran out of the room.

"A governess!" He had forgotten the boy. "Already a governess: Yes; he must be in his sixth year. By gad! And Violet has got on." He looked about him. The room was hung with bright curtains; there were flowers in the window; it was papered and painted in the new style; on the walls were pictures, some of them good; there were choice cups and all kinds of pretty things in cabinets. "She has got on. In the old days there was a ragged carpet here, and it was the girl's school-room, where she learned to act; and a table with marks of beer, and pipes on the mantel-shelf; and an old man in a shabby coat."

"I think—oh! Mr. Perigal, don't go up stairs. I think"—cried Elsie, below, in great agitation—"it is her husband come back again. A tall man with dark eyes. When I said I was the governess, he scowled. Shall I go up stairs and watch beside the boy? Shall I call a policeman?"

"I will beard him," said the actor, solemnly.

When the door opened and the old man appeared, Guy perceived that he was transformed as well—that is, his coat was no longer shabby. Violet's success meant new coats and new boots for her old friend—it would also, let us add, have meant honourable retirement to her father, the carpenter, and her mother, the dresser; but they would have died out of harness—and new furniture for the house, and newness and brightness generally, with a good deal of champagne, which Paul regarded, just as the young man of the present day, as the drink of the gods. The old man also had a beautiful new wig, curly, well combed, and as black as when he was freshly entering upon the thirties. Also his eyebrows were beautifully pencilled, so that if he could have hidden the crow's feet and shaken a more jaunty leg he might have passed for forty.

"Oh!" said Paul, recognising him. "You are the man, are you? You are—the—man." He spoke with a hissing breath between every word, which is one way, and very effective too, of expressing contempt.

"What the devil—" began Guy.

"You are my Violet's husband; and a pretty husband too. You desert her a year after you married her; you send her back without a penny in her pocket for her baby and herself; you leave her for five years; and when she makes her mark and begins to command her price you come back to stand in with her. That is the kind of man, Sir, you are."

It was remarkable about Paul Perigal that, even when in deepest earnest, he used old catchwords of the stage. Sometimes they were so very old that they had long since lost their force.

"Good Lord!" said Guy, taken completely aback at this unexpected charge. He expected to be accused of cruelty, and of neglect, and desertion; but it did not occur to him that his visit would be construed into an attempt to live upon his wife's salary. Yet the suggestion gave him a hint, which he was not slow to act upon. They were afraid that he would claim a husband's rights over her money, were they? Good.

"We are no longer, however," Paul Perigal went on, "without defenders. We have friends. It is no more a question of one old man—nobody but myself—standing between the serpent and his victim—the yild." He really was quite desperately in earnest; but he had personated virtuous indignation so often on the stage that in real emotion he naturally fell back upon the language of melodrama. "We have but to raise our hands, and all London would rise in defence of its favourite, the fair and accomplished Violet—my pupil—"



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HUSBAND AND WIFE.

your innocent victim—Mr.—Mr.—Marryer-under-false-names!"

"You are an old fool!" said Guy.

What Paul would have said in reply, one knows not. While he was gathering himself together for the effort of retort, Violet herself burst into the room. She heard down stairs that a gentleman was waiting for her, and she divined who her visitor might be.

"How dare you come to this house?" she asked, with resolution in her eye.

"I see," said Guy, slowly. He was sitting in her easiest and most comfortable chair, and did not go through the formality of rising for purposes of greeting or courtesy. "I see that success has not changed your temper."

"Daddy," said Violet, quietly, "leave us alone. No, I am not in the least afraid of the man, I assure you." She shut the door after him, and then, standing beside the table, looked her husband in the face, not defiantly, but as one who has the command of the situation.

"I want to talk to you, quietly, and without heroics. If you please to listen."

"Go on," said Violet. "The very sight of you fires my blood—but go on—go on—let me hear you."

"What I have to say shall be brief. When we parted it was on the understanding that we should never at any time trouble one another again."

"It was. Then why do you come here?"

"You told me to go my way, and you would go yours."

"I did. I have gone my way. It has been a hard and toilsome way; but I have won what I wanted."

"Very good, I shall not seek to disturb you in the possession of anything that you may have won if you agree to my proposition. I have gone my way, too. But I have not been so fortunate as you. I have lost what I hoped to win."

"Oh!" She meant to imply that she cared nothing at all whether he won or lost.

"I am now," he continued, "a perfectly ruined man. There is nothing left. I have raised money on my reversionary interests till they are mortgaged to the hilt; I have debts which must be paid—somehow—debts of honour. There is one way by which I can pay those debts."

"What do your debts concern me?"

"They might concern you very seriously. Of course you know that, as your husband, I have the right to draw all your pay."

Violet turned pale. That was what Paul had told her.

"Draw my pay? But we are separated."

"That makes no difference unless we are separated under a bond and agreement, which is not the case. However, the question may not arise. I only mentioned it to show that my creditors might, if they pleased."

"Go on."

"There is, I said, one way only out of the difficulty. It is nothing for you to consent to—in fact, you will be the greatest gainer by it—which is why I expect you to agree—and yet it is everything for me. Tell me, is there the least chance of any present or future reconciliation between us?"

"Never—never—never." Her resolute lips were set firm. She meant it. The wounds inflicted on her by this man were still fresh in her memory. She would never forget them.

"Quite so. And what I expected—and hoped. Yes; hoped, by Jove," he said, in the hard and cruel tones which had formerly maddened her.

"We regard each other," he went on, "with profound aversion. We do not wish ever to meet again, nor even to hear from each other. Is not that the case?"

"It is."

"Then, Violet," he said, springing to his feet, "make the separation complete. We were married in secret. We will be divorced in secret. I give you your liberty. Go; marry—if you please—and any one you please. I am sorry to have stood in your light so long. You are bound no longer—we are divorced."

He spoke rapidly, gesticulating with his hands.

"You agree?" he asked.

She was carried away by his impetuous words; she was on the point of accepting the release offered her, when, fortunately, the old distrust of all he did or said came back to her, and she hesitated.

"You make me free," she said, "on condition of my making you free in return. Is that so?"

"Certainly. It is not a gift which I offer you. I have no gifts for you. The time of making gifts is past and gone long ago. This is a bargain."

"It is a bargain," she repeated. "If I accept it"

"If you accept it," he interposed, "you will be free to make any match you please among your numerous admirers. No one will know anything of the past; nobody need know. I was married as plain Richard Johnson, you in your own name of Emily Hicks. The only witnesses were your own father and the old actor. They can be squared, I suppose. Who would identify Richard Johnson with me? Who would find Emily Hicks in Violet Lovelace?"

"I should be free to marry again. But suppose I do not want to marry again?"

"Hang it! you will some day."

"And you—if I accept—will also marry again."

"Yes; I shall marry a woman with money."

"Do you love her?"

"What has that got to do with the thing? She has money; I want money."

"Yes," she was trying to put the matter quite clearly before herself. "And if I do not accept?"

"Then—many things will happen to you—and to me—and you will discover that the bond of husband and wife may lead to disagreeable surprises. Come, Violet, do not be revengeful, even if I seem at first to have the best of the bargain. In the long run"

"And when he grows up—when the boy asks me who was his father—what am I to say?"

"Richard Johnson, Gentleman, Deceased. Poor Dick! Wipe your eyes. Call him Johnson. Show the boy your marriage lines. Speak tenderly of his father."

"And the boy's rights?"

"What rights?"

"Your heir's rights—what of them? No; when the boy is of age he shall know the truth."

Guy pondered. When the boy came of age. That would be in sixteen years' time. Sixteen years. The curate who had married them had long since forgotten the obscure couple who stood before him one cold day in November. The witnesses, Paul Perigal and Hicks, the carpenter, would most certainly be dead in sixteen years. Who was to identify him with Richard Johnson? Who could prove that the Richard Johnson, the undoubted husband of Violet, was himself—Guy Ferrier? And as for letters from him, there was not one—he remembered with infinite satisfaction—not one, because he had never written her a single letter.

"I agree," he said, softly and persuasively, "to acknowledging the boy as my heir, when he is of age. Till then, you can keep him out of the way. Now, Violet, once more consider my proposal. Let me go free; let me marry without creating any scandal; go and marry yourself, if you like. If you do this, you will have the boy to yourself; you can bring him up anyhow you please. When he is of age, but not before, tell him that he is to be the next Lord Ferrier. Bring him to me, and you will be heartily glad that"

"What kind of things will happen to me?" she asked.

"First of all, there will be an almighty smash. Then, everybody will know that the beautiful Violet Lovelace is the wife of the man who has smashed, and his creditors will include her money in the estate."

"And the Boy—oh! the Boy," she cried.

"A man is always allowed to have the custody of his boy at the age of seven. The boy is now, I suppose, about five. I shall most certainly, if you do not accept my terms, take away the boy as soon as he is seven years of age. Understand me quite clearly. I am not at all the man to be moved by your crying and tears. The boy shall be mine as soon as he is seven years of age."

The mother's cheek grew pale.

"There is no act of cruelty or wickedness," she said, "that you would not commit. But have my boy you shall not, so long as there is a house in England where I may hide him. What next will happen?"

"The boy will be the heir to a title, and nothing else."

"He is that, already. For I suppose you will spend all the money there is."

Violet had never played in any piece where there had been mention of entail. She therefore knew nothing about the laws of real property. People have different opportunities and privileges of acquiring knowledge. An actress learns the secrets of the outside world by the parts she plays.

Guy was about to explain to her that it might be necessary to cut off the entail by consent of the tenant in possession, his father, and himself, but, as he saw that she knew nothing of the subject, he forbore.

"I will acknowledge him. I daresay we shall find a way out of the row about my second marriage, if there is to be any row. Is not this a fair offer? If you do not accept it, you will have to fight for your money and for your boy; because I will lay my hands on both."

"I must consider," said Violet, presently. "I do not know what traps you may be laying. I must consider. I will send you a reply."

"Nonsense," he said, roughly. "What is the use of considering? The thing is perfectly plain. Nothing could be simpler. If you were to consider for a twelve-month, it could not be plainer."

"No. I will not decide without consideration. I will send you a reply. Now, if you please, go."

"If you hate me, as I believe you do, Violet; if you desire never to see or hear from me again, you will accept."

"I do, from my very soul, desire never to see you again. I am a most unhappy woman because I ever fell in your way. Yet I will not accept your offer without further consideration. Listen! Do you hear that voice?"

It was the boy. He had awakened from his morning nap, and Elsie was bringing him, laughing and prattling, down stairs, to have his dinner.

"That is your son's voice. Would you like to see him?"

"No." This evidence of the child's existence startled and alarmed him. "No. I do not wish to see the boy."

"I am glad I heard him, for he has made me very certain I can accept nothing at your hands without consideration. He reminds me, too—could I have forgotten

it?—that your offer to me is a mockery. How should I marry, having to tell that boy his secret? How should I commit this dreadful crime that you propose and dare to look upon the boy and to tell him that secret? How could I bring upon the innocent child shame for his mother? That shame, at least, he shall never feel. I am an actress; that I cannot help. Why, if I could help it, I would not, because it is my pride and joy. I do not think the boy will ever be ashamed of his mother's profession. If he is to be ashamed, it shall be of his father. So—I refuse your proposal."

"Violet, you are a fool; you do not know what you are doing—you do not consider. . . . Remember . . . I do not use idle threats"

"Do what you like—what you can. I refuse your offer. Offer? It is no offer; it is not in your power to give me back my freedom. What a fool I was not to see that from the first! No one can. Nothing but death can cut that miserable tie. There is my answer. And now, if you please, go!"

"One moment, Violet. You can, if you please, set up your back and refuse your consent; but you had better not. Now I modify my offer. You will do as you like. I care nothing at all whether you marry or whether you do not. All I say is, let me do what I please without molestation or fear of interference. Yes; I know what you are going to say. Who is there who will tell you that the man you married six years ago has married again? Don't interfere with me, and then I will not interfere with you. If you stand between me and my proposed marriage, then—Miss Violet Lovelace, or Mrs. Ferrier, or whatever you call yourself—remember that you have a desperate man to deal with."

"And yet I will not promise anything. No—I will consider, before all, the rights of the boy. But I will think it over. If it were not for him, I would let you commit this crime without a word. Because of my boy, because I am a mother, I think not only of him but of the other poor creature whom you are going to delude and lead into misery. Oh! Guy, if you could see yourself as those who know you see you! If you could see the miserable, contemptible figure you cut, when, no doubt, you think you are a gallant gentleman! Go—you are but a sneak and a coward."

He made no reply; but he went away. As he opened the street-door he heard the voice of the boy again shouting and laughing. But this did not soften his heart.

He walked westward, among the squares of Bloomsbury, thinking what he would do. He might break his engagement with Virginia and let the smash come, and await the consequences. He might go on with it and let Violet do what she pleased. That was the best thing to do. Probably she would do nothing. She would be too much afraid of his wrath to do anything. He could take the boy; he could spend her money; he could make himself infernally disagreeable. Yes; he would go on. She would submit. And as soon as these two witnesses to his marriage were dead he would snap his fingers at Violet and bid her do her worst.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.



WHEN the engagement was fairly and happily accomplished, Maude sat down and breathed more freely. If her brother was in debt and difficulties, her father knew nothing, and, for the present,

need know nothing. Perhaps a turn might be taken for the better. Perhaps Guy might be influenced by a wife.

"I shall expect you," she told him, "to pay Virginia the attention she deserves. You must pretend to be in love with her, if you are not. Meantime leave her to me. I have already led her to believe you a second King Arthur—Heaven forgive me! I must manage, somehow, so that the drop from imagination to reality may prove less than . . . than you have given me reason to expect."

"Do you think," he replied, sulkily, "that I shall cuff and kick her? Come, Maude, don't be gloomy. You egged me on. I didn't want to marry the girl. You ought to be happy about it."

"So I should be, Guy, if I could think that any happiness will come to any of us out of it. And it is my doing, whatever comes. Well," she sighed, "do not get into any fresh difficulties before your wedding day. And—oh! Guy; can you—can you keep away from the tables for a little while—only till the autumn?"

He laughed, but not cheerfully. Because he meant that he was not going even to try to keep away from the tables. It was not in order to abstain from the one thing he loved that he was going to run this frightful risk of marriage. Not at all. Quite the contrary. But, then, women are never reasonable.

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GOOD-NIGHT!
IF THOU WILT REMEMBER.
ALAS! ("Alas! how easily things go wrong.")
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"I've got my pockets full of gold, I'll quit the sea," he
cried:
"No more I'll roam, but stay at home, and I'll shall be my
bride!"
Words by Delacour Daubigny; Music by MAX SCHROETER.

A WAYSIDE POSY. Song.

Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, or Baritone. Price 2s. net.
"They strolled across the field one sunny morn in June,
When poppies peep'd among the corn, and all things seem'd
atune;
Loud buzzing were the bees, but 'love,' they say, 'is blind,'
And deaf, I think, as well, for they heard nothing of the kind."
Words and Music by MICHAEL WATSON.

TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT. Song.

Contralto or Mezzo-Soprano. Price 2s. net.
I look back to childhood's summer, and a picture comes to me,
Of an open lattice'd window looking out across the sea;
When a mother's arm was round me, and with voice so sweet
and low,
Told me tales of childhood's dreamland in the twilight long
ago.
Words by F. E. Weatherly; Music by J. L. MOLLOY.

UNDER THE LAMPLIGHT. Song.

Contralto or Mezzo-Soprano. Price 2s.
Under the lamplight, out in the snow,
A girl sang in accents so plaintive and low,
As weary without, while within they rejoiced,
She told her sad story with tears in her voice.
Words and Music by LOUISA GRAY.

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At the Palace that festive day,
And now in the noontide was resting,
As the maidens passed down by the way.
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It imparts peculiar vitality to the roots of the hair, restoring it
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It is not a dye, nor does it contain any colouring matter or
offensive substance whatever. Hence it does not soil the hands,
the scalp, or even white linen, but produces the colour within
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It may be had of any respectable Chemist, Perfumer, or Dealer
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WHAT BEAUTIFIES THE HAIR?

What gives luxuriance to each tress,
And pleases each one's fancies?
What adds a charm of perfect grace,
And Nature's gift enhances?
What gives a bright and beauteous gloss,
And what says each reviewer?
"That quite successful is the use
OF 'THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER!'"

What gives luxuriance to each tress,
And makes it bright and glowing?
What keeps it free from dandruff, too,
And healthy in its growing?
What does such wonders? Ask the press,
And what says each reviewer?
"That none can equal or approach
'THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER!'"

What gives luxuriance to each tress,
Like some bright halo beaming?
What makes the hair a perfect mass
Of splendid ringlets teeming?
What gives profusion in excess?
Why, what says each reviewer?
"The choicest preparation is
'THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER!'"

What gives luxuriance to each tress,
And makes it so delightful?
Because to speak the honest truth
Is only just and rightful.
What say the people and the press,
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"That most superb for ladies' use
Is 'THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER!'"

THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER

has gained for itself the highest reputation, and a decided
preference over all other "hair dressings," as evinced from cer-
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Being compounded with the greatest care—combining, as it does,
all the most desirable qualities of the best hair preparations of
the day, without the objectionable ones—it may be relied on as
the very best known to chemistry for restoring the natural colour
to the hair, and causing new hair to grow on bald spots, unless
the hair glands are decayed; for if the glands are decayed and
gone, no stimulant can restore them; but if, as is often the case,
the glands are only torpid, THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER
will renew their vitality, and a new growth of hair will follow.
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Would you have luxuriant hair,
Beautiful, and rich, and rare;
Would you have it soft and bright,
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This you really can produce
If you put in constant use
THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER.

The hair it strengthens and preserves,
And thus a double purpose serves;
It beautifies—improves it, too,
And gives it a most charming hue,
And thus in each essential way,
It public favour gains each day—
THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER.

If a single thread of hair
Of a greyish tint is there,
This "Renewer" will restore
All its colour as before,
And thus it is that vast renown
Does daily now its virtues crown—
THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER.

No matter whether faded grey,
Or falling like the leaves away,
It will renew the human hair,
And make it like itself appear:
It will revive it, beautify,
And every ardent wish supply—
THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER.

THE MEXICAN HAIR RENEWER.

The constitution of the person and the condition of the scalp
have much to do with the length of time it requires for new hair
to grow; also thin or thick hair will depend much upon the vital
force remaining in the hair-glands. New hairs are first seen to
start around the margin of the bald spots near the permanent
hair, and extending upwards until the spots are covered more or
less thickly with fine short hair. Excessive brushing should be
guarded against as soon as the small hairs make their appear-
ance; but the scalp may be sponged with rain water to ad-
vantage occasionally. The scalp may be pressed and moved on
the bone by the finger ends, which quickens the circulation
and softens the spots which have remained long bald.
On applying this hair-dressing it softens the scalp, and in cases
where the hair begins to fall a few applications will arrest it,
and the new growth presents the luxuriance and colour of
youth. It may be relied on as the best hair-dressing known for
restoring grey or faded hair to its original colour without dyeing
it, producing the colour within the substance of the hair, im-
parting a peculiar vitality to the roots, preventing the hair from
falling, keeping the head cool, clean, and free from dandruff,
causing new hairs to grow, unless the hair-glands are entirely
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It restores the colour,
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Eminently stands the first;
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VIRGINIE.

When one reads how the most worshipful the Lord Mayor, and with him a following of amiable people, lift up their voices against the wickedness of the French in allowing Monaco to continue, one is reminded of a certain text about a mote and a beam, inasmuch as for every franc which is daily lost and won in that wicked peninsula ten thousand are daily lost and won in the hells of this most virtuous city of West London. Yet my Lord Mayor maketh no sign. If, indeed, hypocrisy be chiefly known in the condemnation of sins to which we are secretly addicted, or to which we feel no attraction, then, indeed, we are a nation of the most gigantic hypocrites—Patagonian hypocrites. We hold indignation meetings about the opium trade—and our people are being ruined, body and brain, by bad drinks worse than any opium; we hold up our hands at the buying and selling of slaves; yet we allow women to work twelve hours a day for four shillings a week; and by this underpayment of women's labour, our long hours of shops, and in a hundred other ways, we keep our white slaves, and grow rich upon their labour. All these things make one long for a Prophet, because, if I understand the Prophetic character aright, his most important function—a very uncomfortable one—was to make people see clearly their own wickedness, and the evil things lying under their very noses. No doubt Ahab, before Elijah came, was often indignant when he thought of the abominable wickedness of his Syrian neighbour, Benhadad.

As my Lord Mayor and his friends have not yet spoken on the subject, there exist, for the convenience of young men like Captain Ferrier, half a dozen clubs, where the noble game of baccarat, not to speak of *écarté*, *piquet*, *napoleon*, *pitch* and *toss*, *loo*, *lansquenét*, and many other ingenious devices for the exchange of money—the humbling of the mighty for good, and the exalting of the poor for a season—may be enjoyed. They are chiefly maintained by and for the gilded youth and the youth who are believed to be gilded. These young men of the modern time take their fling in a manner not unworthy of their ancestors, save that for punch they substitute champagne; and for beer, champagne; and for port, champagne; and that they do not laugh much, and are generally rather low in their spirits, and therefore need the stimulus of champagne at breakfast and at luncheon, and at dinner, and at the chiming of the midnight bells, and at early matins. They “fling” in many directions; but for the present one has only to do with their favourite pastime of the midnight baccarat.

Guy's engagement at first brought him luck. Everybody knows how luck follows luck, just as misfortunes crowd thick upon each other. His tradesmen, whose name was legion, suddenly changed their front, and showed an amount of confidence which was exhilarating, and made him feel like buying everything; the men who held his promissory notes ceased to look anxious; the gentleman who had advanced him money on his reversionary interests began to consider prayerfully the subject of the marriage settlements; and, in addition, he had a steady flow of luck nearly every night. So that he really began to consider the girl who was the cause of all this as a most praiseworthy person, deserving of admiration.

He had to be seen with her a good deal in those early days, though, happily, his father took his place, and was never bored with Virginia's society, as he was himself; and was not wishing constantly to be back again tempting Fortune, as he did. It is not every engaged man who has a father willing to take so much arduous work off one's hands. Then Maude was useful, and, between the two, Guy really found that a daily call, or perhaps a dinner at Mrs. Hallows' house, was quite as much as need be expected of a man.

Love-making, under these conditions, fell very, very far short of what poor Virginia expected. There was nothing in it, after all. She was engaged; her lover came most days to see her, and stayed a quarter of an hour, and seemed anxious to get away again: if nobody was in the room he sometimes kissed her forehead coldly; he communicated nothing about himself, his pursuits, his reading, his ambition; nor was he in the least curious about her own—a humiliating thing for a girl not to be thought worth a little curiosity.

It must be her task, Virginia thought, to make him believe her capable of his confidence. That would, doubtless, come in time. Meanwhile, a little expression of feeling, a little ardour, a little warmth of manner seemed wanting even to this inexperienced girl. In what a different voice had Tom—her “brother” Tom—as Mrs. Hallows called him—told her that he loved her! Even the Professor, who owned that he must come after Tom, spoke of his affection for her with warmer voice and greater show of passion. But men are, doubtless, different: this man of reserve kept his deeper feelings in his own heart. Virginia would get at them in time.

“My dear,” said Maude, smiling, though she looked anxious, when the girl confided these thoughts to her, “do not make an idol or a god of your husband. You know, in a sister's eyes, it is difficult for a brother to do wrong. But a wife is not a sister. You, who will be with him constantly”—Virginia's heart sank at the prospect, though she knew not why—“will find faults in him of which I know nothing. You will have to excuse them.”

“Guy,” she said, passionately, “have you no heart?”

“What is the matter now, Maude?”

“It is your neglect of that poor girl. What do you look for? A more beautiful woman? There are no more beautiful women.”

“What am I to do, then?”

“Pretend that you are in love with her. I have no patience! Oh! But for one thing—but for my father's sake—I would break it off even now.”

“Don't do that, Maude. Come, I will go and buy her something. It can't be paid for till after the wedding; so it does not signify.”

“Oh! Guy”—his absolute inability to see what was wanted made her laugh—“one hopes you may make a better husband than lover.”

For some reason, he scowled and became moody; and that something was not bought. He remembered, in fact, that he was already a husband, and not successful in that profession; also that he had as yet received no letter of submission from Violet—a thing which he confidently looked for. This made him feel ill-used.

Then Maude took Virginia with her to see The Towers, their country house. It was a splendid old place, worth seeing, if only for its age, for the memories of the many generations who had lived there, and for the accumulations of treasures forming part of the family history; a picturesque old place, many-gabled, built of warm red brick, standing among its gardens and trees; a stately and proud old place, fit home for an old English family.

“This,” she said, taking her visitor to the rooms, “will all, some day, be yours, as it was your great-grandmother's. I hope you like this prospect, fair Chatellaine.”

“Oh!” Virginia gasped, “Maude, it is wonderful.”

It is, indeed, truly wonderful to go over an old house belonging to an old family who have kept themselves and their things together. The family portraits, the books, the arms and armour, the furniture, the plate, the china, the very staircases and landings, the windows, the gables, the roof of the house, are all things that cannot be bought.

“I have never felt before,” Virginia whispered, “what it meant to possess ancestors. Here one feels what it may mean. All these things speak to us; they belong to us, but we belong to them. In this old place one seems to hear, day and night, the voices of the dead. They are calling to us to keep up the honour of the House.”

“Yes,” said Maude, “I feel the same thing every time I come here. It is the place of our ancestors. We are among them all. It cannot be but that their spirits haunt the place which we all of us have loved so well. From generation to generation, from father to son, we have been English gentlefolk; not great statesmen or great generals; but we have taken our share and done our work. Not one but has kept the scutcheon spotless; not one who has disgraced.”—Here she stopped, and her eyes filled with tears, because she thought of one who had already gone so far to bring sorrow and shame upon them, for whose sake she had done her best to bring sorrow and shame upon the girl with her.

Virginia took her hand, thinking that Maude's tears were due to her respect and love for her ancestors.

“It is a great thing, Maude,” she said, “to belong to this House; it is a very solemn thing to marry the heir. Forgive me if I seem to think too little of it.”

“No, dear; I was not thinking of that. See! here is a portrait of Guy as a child. Its companion picture is of a former Guy, Lord Ferrier, taken at the same age, in the time of Charles the First. Do you see the wonderful likeness in the boys? Yet there are two hundred years between them, and one is dust and ashes. There is another of the same Lord Ferrier, taken later on, after the Restoration.”

That whole day they spent among the portraits and the family pictures. Maude knew all their histories, and Virginia, for the first time, learned the Romance of a great House whose history has been preserved. It makes one weep to think how our middle-class people neglect their genealogies, so that they know nothing of their own people, and have no pride, and learn no lessons from the past. Cannot something be done, my friends? Can we not write the annals of our own generation, each for his own family, so that whatever the fate of our children and grandchildren, they, too, may feel that they have ancestors who lived, and loved, and hoped, and made a little success, perhaps, and died and were forgotten, as they, too, in their turn, shall die?

“Oh!” cried the Creole girl, “my father told me so little of all these things.”

“He did not know,” said Maude. “No one knows except myself. My father knows something; Guy, nothing. The women of the House keep up its memories, not the men. That matters nothing, if they are true to their name and its ambitions.”

Then they hunted among the old books in the library, and examined the tapestry, the collections, the engravings, and the heaps of things belonging to their ancestors still preserved in this strange and wonderful museum. Virginia returned to town strengthened as to her engagement. Her lover might be cold, but he was the heir; it was a great thing to marry the future Master of the Towers.

Guy showed no interest in her visit, and seemed to care little for the old place of which his father and sister were so proud. “Could,” asked Virginia, “could he be one of those who are deaf to the voice of the dead?”

Alas! He was deaf to every voice; he heard nothing, he saw nothing; if all his ancestors had appeared to him—ghostly phantoms pointing long fingers of warning, showing him the future that lay before him—he would have closed his eyes and gone on his way heedless. Other men, given to vices more repulsive, can listen to the voice of conscience or the calls of honour and duty. Drunkards get hot coppers and see triangles and rats and dogs, and repent and bang their heads with their fists and call themselves hard names. Wrathful men, who break the third commandment and the furniture, are ashamed when the fit is over. Envious men, backbiters, downers, have moments of sorrow, when they feel mean. Even house agents sometimes regret that they must always play the game so low. The gambler alone never thinks, or heeds, or feels any emotion for his fellow-creatures. He is concentrated in himself: he is self-contained; he feels no interest, has no anxiety, takes no part or share in anything save only the chances of the cards. The voices of the dead! If the voices of the living can do nothing for such men what can we expect of the dead?

CHAPTER VIII.

HER SIMPLE DUTY.



THREE days—four days—a fortnight passed over during which Violet sent no message of submission at all, and her husband felt more ill-used and more indignant.

She was thinking: the longer she thought over the matter the more difficult it was to act. She had, to be sure, refused

his proposal with contempt; but she exaggerated her own helplessness: she was ignorant and did not know what safeguards may be gained by claiming protection of the law. She was in the false position of a wife not owned by her husband's friends. She did not think of putting herself in a lawyer's hands, still less did she contemplate the possibility of taking the child to his grandfather, and asking his protection, for she was firmly convinced that in any contest with her husband, all his relations would combine to bring the weight of their united influence against her. The wicked nobleman theory is not yet quite exploded. Indeed, there are plenty of agitators who still try to lash their auditors into a rage by depicting the vices of the bloated Lords.

She was afraid. She might let her husband do what he proposed to do—that is, marry again, just as if she did not exist; or she might forbid the marriage. In the former case she would be rewarded by an open acknowledgment of her son's true position after sixteen years; but how was she to prove after sixteen years that “Richard Johnson” was Guy Ferrier? And if she could not prove that, her boy's rights would have been wilfully and wastefully thrown away. In the latter case, if she refused her consent, who would protect her and the boy from her husband's interference?

After a fortnight of anxious consideration she took Paul Perigal into her counsels and told him for the first time the whole story, and her husband's true name, and the latest proposition he had made.

“You wait,” he said, “for sixteen years. So much interval between the acts. The boy has grown a man. You take him—yourself closely veiled—to the lordly castle of his ancestors, you say to him, ‘Boy, this is yours!’ If his father is living, you bring his son to him. He will be laid up with gout—they always are at five-and-forty. You will say, ‘My Lord, I restore to you—your son and heir. I am your wife!’ Then ‘who,’ cries her Ladyship, clutching her hair with wild gesture and despairing eyes, ‘who am I?’ It seems a strong part to play, Violet.”

“And who's to prove it, Daddy?”

“I can prove it, Violet. You forget that you have me—always.”

You can't tell an old man of eighty that in all human probability he will be dead in sixteen years.

“If we were to try any other plan, Daddy?”

He reflected.

“There used to be a situation in . . . what was the name of it? They played it at the Adelphi . . . The Bridal Party interrupted . . . the appearance of the real wife—I forbid the ceremony”—Shrieks of the Bride—Impotent Rage of the Villain.”

Violet shook her head.

“I've always got to remind you, Daddy, that we play now for the half-guinea stalls, not for the pit and the gallery.”

There was no use in consulting the old man. His

views were too narrowly professional. Violet returned to her silent musings, and found no help there.

"What is the matter, Violet?" asked Elsie, who had observed with concern the most unusual phenomenon of a failure in her employer's usually robust appetite.

"Elsie, I am truly miserable."

"I have seen it," said Elsie, "for a week and more. Can I help you?"

"No, child, you cannot; unless you find me a man to advise with. I want an honest man and a wise man."

"I think I know the very man; that is, if you would consult with a friend of mine. He is a gentleman—a University scholar; and he is going to be a great writer. He lives with us." Here she remembered her dreadful deception, and she blushed a rosy red and went on, speaking fast:—"And oh! Violet, I must confess to you. When you said you wanted a real lady I ought not to have come, because my father was only a small clerk and my mother lets lodgings, and if it had not been for Mr. Percival I should never have been educated at all. Now, please, send me away, because I have deceived you."

"My dear child," said Violet, "what a fuss about nothing at all! Send you away! Why, what would the boy do without you? And did you suppose I thought your father was a Viscount? Goodness me! he was a Crutch and Toothpick swell compared with mine, who is nothing in the world but a carpenter at Drury Lane—poor old dear! And what was your father, Daddy?" For Paul was standing beside them.

"Hum!" he replied. "My father—now with the angels . . . was . . . in fact—he was . . . but

"When Fortune means to men most good,
She looks upon them with a threatening eye."

"You see, Elsie," said Violet. "So, there, nothing more need be said. And about this Mr. Percival, I can't ask a stranger here and begin—Once there was a girl. Would he call upon me if you ask him? Most men would like the chance," she added, with a laugh.

"He admires you very greatly," said Elsie. "We often go together to the pit to see you. He isn't rich, you know."

"Together? Why—Elsie—you, of all people in the world!"

"Oh! no . . . no . . . no," she cried, blushing. "It isn't that—of all things. Oh! pray don't think it is that. Why, Mr. Percival has known me for years. He used to lodge with us long ago. And he must be getting on for thirty years of age now."

"What a great age. But yet . . . Well, Elsie, about this friend of yours. It seems a foolish thing to have no one to ask for advice—to have to ask a stranger. But yet . . . You are sure he is a wise man."

"Oh! he is very wise."

"And would he come?"

"He would if I were to ask him, I think."

"I don't see what I can do. I must ask somebody. Well, Elsie, ask him, please. If he will be so good as to interest himself in a stranger's affairs I will see him if he will come to me. Tell him that I am in trouble, and want the advice of a sensible man with discretion. To think that of all the men I know there is not one to whom I can go and ask for a little real advice. Never be an actress, child; because it is all show and make-believe, and people get to think you have no thoughts, no feelings, no hopes, and no anxieties of your own. You must always look and talk as if there was nothing but laughing in the world."

Elsie opened upon the subject that very evening, but with little effect; because Mr. Percival was agitated about quite another matter, and could think and talk of nothing else. Yet he promised to see Miss Violet Lovelace. The business Elsie said was connected with her husband, who had come back, and, she supposed, wanted money.

"It will end," he said, "in her going to a solicitor, and getting a deed of separation in order to protect her and her child. Well; I will go with you, Elsie, but I do not suppose I can do much. I am not a lawyer nor a solicitor, nor do I know how to apply the screw to gentlemen who wish to live upon the labours of their wives. Three dozen at a cart-tail one might recommend, but the absurd law of the land does not allow it."

What had happened that day was this—

Percival received a confidential letter from Palmiste—from the Pink Boy, in fact. As the accountant of the bank, where the strictest confidence should be observed, he ought not to have written the letter. But he was young, and anxiety for his friends may be pleaded as an excuse.

"It is all over, I fear," he wrote, "with Mon Désir. The poor old Captain has got a most awful bad crop; the estate won't pay working expenses this year, and I know that we can't advance any more money upon it. What he will do I cannot tell, but he will most certainly, unless he can raise any more money, have to become bankrupt. Then the estate will be sold. It seems hard after all these years. Can you go and tell Miss Ferrier? Her mother and Madame Kemys do not know. I should think, anything about it. And even the Squire himself knows very little. She might be able to raise some money. She will be of age in a year or two; meanwhile the money is wanted at once. It is hard that her thousands should be lying idle, so to speak, without being useful to the man who has been so good a trustee for her. Go and see her at once, and tell her eight

thousand or so would pull the old man through this year, and next year one may hope for a better crop. It is very unlucky that the little touch of a cyclone which passed over us in March seems to have picked out Mon Désir, above all others, for damage. Tom looks rather haggard over something, but even he doesn't know the whole danger. Perhaps he is haggard about Virginia. I'm a good deal worn myself—you wouldn't know me again—and the Padre isn't the same man since she went away. I suppose I mustn't send my love, and perhaps if I did you would not be the man to take it. Don't be mean, and try to cut out Tom. But we hear that she is always with her great cousins. If she should go and marry that beast of a man"—

Thus far the Pink Boy.

Percival lost no time at all in taking the letter to Virginia. He went that very morning.

"Why," she asked, "do you never come to see me?"

"Because it isn't safe. In this country we know our level; I belong to Grub-street; you to Mayfair. Because you are a young lady of fashion, and I am only an obscure person whose fortune for the moment is out at elbows."

"But we are old friends," said Virginia. "You ought to have come here long ago. Sit down and let us talk."

Then Percival unfolded his tale.

"Oh!" cried Virginia. "It is dreadful. Something must be done. What can be done? Can't he use my money?"

"You can ask some lawyer here to lend you money, which you must pay to the bank to his account. I can think of no other way. And I am so ignorant of money matters that I do not even know how to advise you; but then any lawyer will know."

"I will ask Guy," said Virginia.

"Your cousin, Captain Ferrier? Yes; he would know."

"I did not tell you, Mr. Percival," she said, blushing, "I am engaged to be married to my cousin."

"Poor Tom!" The intelligence fell upon him so suddenly that he was fain to put his thoughts into words.

She bent her head, and did not reply for a moment. Then she said, softly,

"Tom was always my brother."

Percival rose.

"You will, then," he said coldly, "consult Captain Ferrier how best to save this good man—your guardian and your father's friend—from ruin. I knew that I had only to lay the matter before you. Thank you for your attention."

He touched her fingers, and left her.

Why had her old friend the Professor treated her in such a manner? What had she done? Alas! she understood, too well. Poor Tom!

As Percival left the house, he met the accepted lover, and saluted him, but without the usual smile of recognition. Guy was in a vile temper that morning; he wanted an answer from Violet, and he was afraid to call upon her again; he was afraid that she might find out his engagement, which was already in the papers; he would have kept away from his fiancée altogether but for Maude, who made him go.

His temper got the better of him when he saw a man—one of the many men—whom he hated, actually leaving the house.

"You, Sir," he cried, "You—what is your name?"

"My name is Percival, as you know very well, Captain Ferrier."

"What are you doing in this house?"

"You had better," said the other, "ask Miss Ferrier."

"I forbid you the house," said Guy. "I will not allow you to call upon Miss Ferrier."

"Have you anything more to say?" For Virginia's sake, Percival kept his temper down. Yet it was hard not to "go" for that ill-conditioned brute. Poor Virginia!

"No, Sir. I have nothing more to say. You have my commands."

"Then, Captain Ferrier, as I am not in your Company, let me tell you that I do not take commands from you. Good morning."

Guy found his cousin in tears. He took no notice of her agitation, being still in a towering rage.

"Virginia," he said, "that man is never to come to the house again. You must never speak to him if you meet him; you are not to know him. Do you hear?"

"What man?"

"The man who has just been here. Percival is his confounded name."

"My old friend? Why not?"

"Because I wish it."

"I have just heard very bad news," she said, passing over this thing, though she wondered greatly. Then she told her news.

"Going to be bankrupt, is he?" asked Guy. "That seems a pity. But it isn't your fault."

"He shall not be bankrupt," said Virginia, firmly, "if I can help it. Bankrupt! when I have all those thousands, doing no one good. Why, if it cost me all my fortune, he should not be bankrupt."

He laughed in contempt.

"Give up your whole fortune? Oh! come, Virginia, don't be ridiculous. Your money is not to be made ducks and drakes of in that fashion. These people must help themselves out of the mess."

"But I must save my dear old guardian, Guy, I must. Do you not understand? He was my father's closest friend; his wife is my mother's cousin; he has been everything to me. Cannot you see that I must go to their help?"

"No, I can't. Your fortune belongs to yourself—and to your husband."

"I have no husband—yet." She looked dangerous; but Guy's temper made him careless of what he said. Of course he meant that her fortune was already promised to himself.

"I shall not allow you to fool your money away," he went on, in his blundering, stupid, selfish way.

Her colour mounted to her cheek. Was this a way for a girl to be addressed by a lover?

"I do not understand you, this morning, Guy. First you forbid me to keep up the acquaintance of a gentleman for whom I have the greatest regard; next, you refuse to recognise my dearest obligations. As for asking your permission—but you had better leave me."

It was his cursed temper, he said to Maude, afterwards. What business had the girl to talk of giving away her fortune—his money?

He obeyed; but, still being wrathful, he fired a parting shot.

"I am sorry," he said, "that you object to common sense. Perhaps to-morrow, Virginia, you will have recovered your reason."

He came away, leaving her bewildered. Was this her gallant and chivalrous lover? Was it possible for a man of such exalted principle and noble feeling to disapprove of the help she wanted to give her oldest and truest friends? Could she have been deceived?

It was the first part of this business which Mr. Percival was still turning over in his mind.

Poor Tom! Poor Virginia!

That was the burden of his song. The coming failure was nothing compared with this loss and throwing away and waste of love. Even the break up of Mon Désir estate was but a small thing compared with the marriage of this sweet and precious girl with a man so churlish, so morose, and so selfish.

"Elsie," he said, "prate to me no more of Violet Lovelace. I have had to do with worse troubles than hers."

"Not troubles of your own?" The girl was quick to think for him.

"No, not my own. I told you that the spell was removed from the Enchanted Island when Virginia came away."

"Yes."

"The palace of jasper and malachite and white marble became a simple bungalow, with elephant creeper and honeysuckle climbing round it, and a compound planted with roses and mignonette and pretty things about it. Now the bungalow itself is to be destroyed and its occupants turned out."

"Oh!"

"One of them is an old man. And it will probably kill him. One is a young man, and his chances are ruined."

"Oh! your poor friends."

"And Virginia"—He paused.

"Virginia?"

"A dreadful dragon has got hold of Virginia. He will first devour and destroy all that she possesses, and after that he will rend her to pieces. Poor Tom!"

"Oh! is it true?"

"It wouldn't help me much, now, if I had dropped Tom over the ravine. Yet I wish I had, because it would have saved him this dreadful blow. Going suddenly over the ravine would have hurt less and killed him sooner. I believe it is quite a pleasant way to get rid of life, if it is done unexpectedly. But in these cases, Elsie, everything depends upon the skill of the operator. A clumsy practitioner, now, might make the operation really a painful one. Poor Tom! I really wish I had."

CHAPTER IX.

SHALL I TELL HER?



IT is very good of you to come, Mr. Percival," said Violet, when he presented himself. "Elsie told you what I want."

"She said you want a wise man, Miss Lovelace; which made it the more remarkable for you to consult me."

"Elsie says you are wise; and perhaps, though you may not be wise in your own affairs"—she said this without meaning any reflection on the undoubted shabbiness of the hat—"you may be in other people's. If you will listen to me—if you have the time."

"At present, Miss Lovelace, I have all the time there is, or nearly all. I will listen like one end of a telephone, if I can be of any use to so charming an actress."

"Elsie said you were a good fellow," said Violet. "Let us be friends, Mr. Percival. You must call me Violet. It isn't my real name, so it doesn't matter. Besides, lots of men call me Violet who never want to help me at all."

"Very well, Violet—you do me very great honour—and if I can be of the least service"—

"Think it is for Elsie's sake," she interposed, anxious to check the first shadow of a flirtation. "And then give your attention to an unfortunate married person, whose husband ought to be put in the pillory, and kept there till there wasn't a rotten egg or a bad potato left."

"For Elsie's sake, then," he replied, laughing. Then the actress told her story, anonymously. "May I call your husband names?" asked Percival.

"If you please."

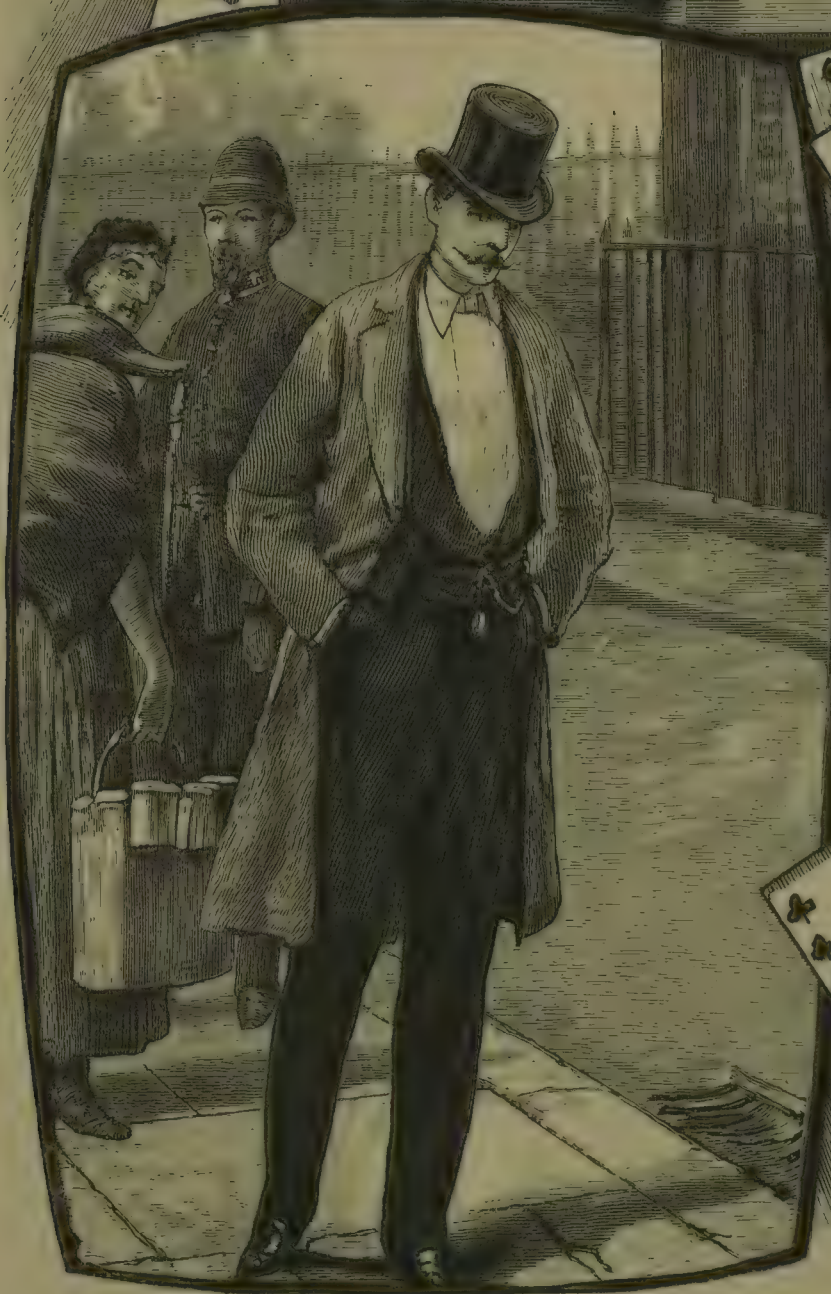
"He wants you to stand by and see yourself and your child insulted, while he ignores your existence

and marries again; he wants you to be the accomplice in a crime in which you lose all and he gains everything; he wants you to accept his bare promise to acknowledge the boy as soon as he is of age—when the *witnesses who could prove his identity with your husband will perhaps be dead*; and he threatens to follow, rob, and annoy you, to take the boy—to— Good God! I cannot call him names. There are no names in the English language which I can find strong enough. But I know a little Hindustani, and I will swear at him for a few moments in that tongue." He did so, which relieved his mind. "But your course is quite clear. Put yourself into the hands of a lawyer, and have a separation, properly drawn up. Is the man—I do not ask out of any impertinent curiosity—but is he a gentleman?"

"Certainly he is."

"I don't mean—does he wear black cloth instead of corduroy. But is he a





W. W. OVEREND, DEL.

W. J. PALMER, SC.

"He walked home to his chambers in a kind of dream."



man of any position?"

"He is the heir to a Peerage."

"In that case you are quite safe. There may be one or two bad hats among eldest sons; but there is not one, I am sure—there cannot be one—who would dare to take his wife's salary and deprive her of her son."

"Not if he were ruined?"

"Not then; because, you see, the heir to a Peerage must—he must—pay some regard to honour. He may drink and gamble; he may do all kinds of bad things; but such a thing as your husband threatens you with he dares not do. No: if he were ten times ruined he could not do it."

Violet breathed.

"This is a *very* bad man," she said. "I think he is the most selfish of all men that ever lived: and the basest. Boys take after their mothers, they say: else I should have no joy in my son for fear he should take after his father."

"Get your deed of separation drawn up. You have, doubtless, valid reasons for desiring the separation; he would not wish for publicity:—you may rest in perfect safety."

"But if I refuse my consent, all his family would back him up."

"Oh! no. What are you thinking of? Do you believe it possible that the family of any English gentleman would back up their son in such abominable wickedness as this?"

Violet had been thinking of the Wicked Duke and the Virtuous Milliner of song and story and melodrama; and now began to suspect that perhaps these picturesque characters might be theatrical, and belong to a melodrama.

"I will tell you all, Mr. Percival, because I am at my wit's end and would do anything—even be an accomplice in bigamy—rather than let my boy's rights be lost. His father is the only son of a Lord: he is about eight-and-twenty; he is completely ruined by gaming; he has mortgaged his reverses—no, his reversions!"

"His reversi-nary interests?"

"For as much as they will bring; and he is in despair. And he has got hold of a girl with money. If he marries her all will be well, he says. If not, all will be ill. The girl's name I do not know. His name is the Honourable Guy Talbot Ferrier. And I am his—Gracious, Mr. Percival, what is the matter?"

He sprang from his chair and began dancing round the room, because the wrath which seized him at that moment was too much to be endured.

"The villain! . . . the double-dyed villain! . . . the scoundrel! I knew he was capable of anything from the very first . . . he looks it . . . there is rogue and traitor and liar and common cheat stamped upon his face. Oh! . . . oh! . . . oh!"

Violet looked at him in amazement which partook of amusement. Because she had never before had an opportunity of seeing genuine, unrestrained wrath freely manifested. It is, if you think of it, one of the rarest of things. Afterwards she "rendered" this portion of the scene to Paul very faithfully, and they made a note of it for future use.

"Do you know him, then, Mr. Percival?"

He stopped in his wild career, in which he had broken two chair legs.

"Yes, I do know him," he replied fiercely. "What is more—I know the girl whom he wants to marry. But we shall stop that. Thank Heaven, we shall stop that!"

"Stop it by all means," said Violet; "but don't forget my boy's interests."

"We will not. She is the sweetest girl, the kindest-hearted, prettiest, most noble, most perfect, most lovely of women."

"But I thought you were in love with Elsie, Mr. Percival. That was why I asked you to help me; and now it seems as if you were in love with . . . no . . . no . . . she can't be my rival, because" . . . Here she stopped abruptly.

"Elsie! Elsie! oh! yes—Elsie. I am in love, first of all, with Virginia. Elsie is a good little thing; but—Virginia!"

"Good little things may have hearts of their own, Mr. Percival. Remember that."

"As Beatrice was to Dante, as Laura was to Petrarch, so is Virginia to those who love her." He was so deeply moved with indignation that he said these words in perfect earnestness and solemnity.

"What's the use of loving a woman if you can't marry her?" asked Violet.

Percival made no reply. The explanation and apology of a man's loves to a perfect stranger was a descent from melodrama to farce. There should always be a funny man in every piece, but Percival had no wish to play the part.

"How shall we act?" he asked. "We must think of her as well as of yourself."

"If you will tell me the girl's name, and where she lives, I will write, or go to see her, and tell her the truth at once. Do you think she is fond of him?"

"I do not know. Yes; the sooner the better—not a day should be lost. I cannot think he would dare to marry her without some promise of silence from you. I wondered when I saw him first, last New-Year's Day, what the man had done to make him so morose and black of visage."

"He had married me," said Violet, "and he couldn't get rid of me."

"That ought not to make a man morose," replied Percival, gallantly.

Violet laughed.

"If I had married you I think I should have gone dancing and singing," he said; yet, with a little hesitation and half a blush, because, perhaps, she would not like this turn of the conversation. But she did.

"I don't mind compliments a bit," she said. "Lord! Everybody pays me compliments. I get them, with bouquets, sent to the stage door; and letters; and in poetry and in prose; and from all sorts of men—prince to potboy. Men are all alike; they fall in love with a woman made up for the stage with vaseline and rouge and powder; and they think she is a goddess; and they think they may 'hope,' as they call it. But don't get serious, or I must tell Elsie. So you think you would not have been so morose if you had been my husband. I don't think you would, and I wish to Heaven that you were my husband, or any other honest man, instead of the poor creature I have got. Well, . . ." she sighed heavily, "let us have patience, and spoil his little plot."

"You may do one of two things—you may tell his father or you may tell Virginia. One of these two things you must do. If you choose the first you can never again be threatened in this way. If the second, she will learn the truth in the most direct way."

"I cannot tell Lord Ferrier," said Violet. "I promised him—my husband—that I would not obtrude myself upon any of his family. Nothing but the interests of the boy would make me break that promise. Let me go to Miss—. What is her name?"

"Miss Ferrier—she is his second cousin. Perhaps that would be best. But go at once—to-day."

He sat down and wrote a letter.

"Dear Virginia,—

"I have made a discovery of the highest importance to you. The lady who bears this note will tell you what it is. You may *entirely* depend upon the truth of what she says. I grieve to be the sender—not the cause—of such a tale as she has to tell you."

"Yours always and sincerely,

"PHILIP PERCIVAL."

"There!" he said. "The letter is plain and straightforward. You will tell her kindly, will you not?"

"I will tell her as kindly as I can," said Violet. "There cannot be much kindness in telling a girl that the man she—loves—perhaps—I loved him once, or thought I did—is such as my husband."

"But you will not—oh! no—I am sure you feel for her. It is not her fault!"

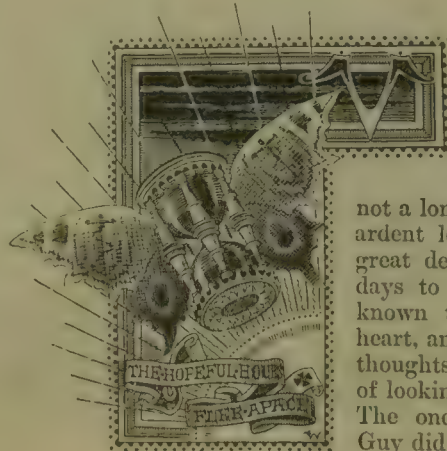
"I will be very kind and gentle," said Violet, softening. Then she laughed, and said, "Shall I rehearse the scene to you? I can be the injured wife—see"—her face became pale, her eyes fixed, her arms dropped to her side, her form rigid—she was a woman in the first despair of a deadly blow. "Or the raging woman whose lover has been snatched from her. So." She threw herself back, and became a figure full of life,



passion, and wrath, her left arm raised high above her head, her right hand quivering at her bosom. She was Medea. "Or I will take it crying. See." She sank upon her knees with a low wail, forced from her by her misery, and buried her despairing head in her hands. "Or shall I triumph over her sorrow?"

"You are a wonderful actress. You can represent any passion, and any person. Represent for me, now, the real Violet Lovelace, the woman who has a heart!"

"No." She took the letter and read it. "That part is reserved for Miss Ferrier—if there is a woman with a heart at all. But I don't know—sometimes nothing is real but the boy—and Daddy. And the best part of him, poor old man! is his wig. You can trust me, Mr. Percival. I will be as kind as I can. You know that I have never been taught the gentle ways and soft words that ladies learn—I mean some ladies—not all. Because I have seen them fighting to get out after the performance, and struggling for good places at a sale and a picture show; and really I think that we behave much better on the stage."



CHAP. X.

VIRGINIE had been engaged exactly a fortnight. It is

not a long time, but an ardent lover may do a great deal in fourteen days to make himself known to his sweetheart, and to learn her thoughts and her way of looking upon things. The one thing which Guy did to reveal himself was to forbid her

to receive the visits of one old friend, and to fly into a rage when she spoke of saving another old friend from ruin. What did this mean? She was astonished and perplexed. Perhaps when Guy came again he would explain how she had misled him.

Certainly he would not, he could not, object to her trying to help her guardian. She met Maude in the evening, but said nothing about her trouble. No doubt Guy would come in the morning and explain, and all would be well.

He did not come; he had, in fact, though he knew it not, seen Virginia for the last time; he stayed in his own rooms, morose and savage. Why did Violet make no sign? What did she mean? And if the other girl was going to give away her money—his money—it might just as well be broken off at once. Better, in fact, let the smash come.

Virginia waited for him all the morning. As he did not come, she thought of writing to him. Hitherto, no letters had passed between them; none of the little notes meaning nothing, except, always, "Je t'aime—je t'aime," which are so common among some lovers. Not one note, not one word of endearment—truly a frigid lover and a disappointing engagement. On the other hand, plenty of notes from Lord Ferrier, who was much more in love with her than his son, and was, in fact, the only one of the four concerned who was entirely happy over the engagement. She could not write. He must either come and make rough things smooth, in person, or he must write; she could not.

Early in the afternoon she received a letter, and was informed that the lady who brought it was waiting to see Miss Ferrier. It was Percival's letter. What misfortune could it be? She thought of her guardian, and assumed that it was connected with him. Had the blow really fallen, and so suddenly? But no mail could have come in since yesterday, when her own letters reached her, and spoke about nothing unusual.

"It was a young lady, apparently about five-and-twenty, dressed in some plain dark costume. She wore rather a thick veil, for the time of year."

"Oh!" cried Virginia, "you have come from Mr. Percival to tell me something. What has happened? Is it my guardian?"

"No, Miss Ferrier; it is not your guardian."

"Will you, please, tell me what it is?"

Violet looked at her for a few moments in silence. She was certainly a very pretty girl, and not the least in her own style.

"Yes," she said; "I will tell you. But it is rather a long story."

"Tell me first whom it concerns."

"It concerns—yourself."

"Some misfortune has happened to myself! What can that be?"

"I did not say misfortune. What I am going to tell you will avert the worst misfortune which could happen to any woman."

"You are mysterious. May I ask your name?"

"I am called, on the stage, Violet Lovelace. I am an actress by profession. You may have seen me at the theatre."

"Yes, indeed I have," said Virginia. "I have seen you several times. But what story can you have that concerns myself?"

"I have a very sad story, and one which concerns you very closely. Tell me, first—do not, pray do not, think me impertinent—do you love Guy Ferrier?"

"I am engaged to him."

"Yet . . . still . . . do you love him?"

"I cannot answer that question. I ought not to answer it. I do not know how to answer it."

"You do not know. I am glad of it. Because you would have answered it easily—if . . . You are his cousin, are you not?"

"Yes; I am his cousin."

"I will ask you no more questions, Miss Ferrier. I will tell you my story."

Violet is a very clever woman. If she had not been an actress she might have been a great dramatist or a great novelist. She told her own story in the most effective way possible. She did not begin with "There was once a girl." She said, "I was a poor girl, a street child, a gutter child, who played in a court and danced to a barrel organ."

She struck at once the note of poverty, ignorance, belief in the promises of a gentleman. She told how, after years of training, she came out in small parts at a London house; how a gentleman was introduced to her. "Very few gentlemen were introduced to me then, because I was a very insignificant little person in those days. This one was young—not more than one or two and twenty—he was one of those young men who must always have what they desire, without waiting for it, and at whatever cost; and he fell in love with me; he fell so much in love that he must needs marry me at once. I was so silly that I thought it a splendid thing to marry a gentleman, and we were married, in a church and before witnesses. He was a handsome man, and, of course, I thought he would be as good as he was handsome; and I was a pretty girl, and he thought he would always love me as much as he did then." So far it was a tale of love; a tale of the Prince and the Beggar Girl.

Then her note changed. The second act began with a small lodging, a husband who repented of his act a week after he had done it, and was already weary of his wife; and then a baby; and cruel words, with neglect, desertion, and reproaches. And that act closed with the flight of the mother and her child.

Virginia sat listening in wonder. Such a tale, so told, she had never heard or looked to hear. Why, in the gestures, the voice, the look of the actress she saw scene after scene of the sad story as if it was being

played by all the actors in it, before her eyes. More than this, out of the words and the voice she constructed the despicable hero of the piece, and she shuddered because she was made, in spite of herself, to think of Guy. As the actress stood when she put hard and cruel words into her husband's mouth, as she held her head, so he stood, so he held his head. But she put the thought behind her. And was it not his very voice that spoke those words?

Then came the Third Act. But as Virginia listened her heart grew cold, because it seemed to her as if she heard the very footsteps of Guy, drawing nearer and nearer, as if she heard his voice, heard his words. The air was heavy with the presence of her lover.

"Who . . . who . . . is the man?" she cried.

Before her stood nothing but the thin figure of a woman; but beside the woman, there seemed to be the ghost of her own lover—no more noble, no more the perfect knight, but downcast, with hanging head, uttering shameful words, a craven, a coward, and a liar.

"Who is the man?" she cried, passionately.

Violet went on with her drama, heedless of the question.

Then Virginia saw how this ghost, this wretched creature, maddened with debts, sent to the woman he had married, and proposed that they should both go on for the future as if there had been no marriage: how she refused the offer, because the boy should never be ashamed of his mother: how then he asked her—but she refused again—to make no sign if he acted as though he were not already married, because by marrying a certain girl with a large fortune he could put his difficulties straight, and in sixteen years' time, but not till then, when the boy was of age, he would acknowledge him to be his lawful heir.

She stopped; her story was told.

Then she took Virginia by both hands, and said, while natural tears of pity rose to her eyes,

"Poor child! I hope you do not love him; because this man, this villain, my husband, is none other than Guy Ferrier."

"I knew it, from the beginning," said Virginia, quickly. "I saw it must be he. I knew his voice, and his gestures. Let me think a little. I do not know what to say, or what to think."

"Certainly," thought Violet, "this is not the way in which a lovesick maid would receive the news. She does not love him."

"I must ask him," said Virginia, presently, "if your story is true. But Mr. Percival says that what you say is true."

Then they were silent again.

"Shall I show you his son?" asked Violet. "The boy is not like his father."

"Oh! No . . . no . . . no. I want to see nothing and no one belonging to him."

Virginia went to the open window. Outside there were the carriages and the people, and there was the clear bright sunshine of the sweet June day. But she took no note of these things. Presently she returned to the table by which Violet was sitting.

"I know why you asked me if I love him. Tell me—you—do you love him?"

"No."

"Did you ever love him?"

"I do not know. I was young and foolish. No gentleman had ever spoken of love to me before. I thought I did. Heaven knows, I might have loved him had he chosen. Now I cannot even pity him."

"Do you think I might have loved him, too—in time?"

"I do not know."

"To live with him for fifteen years. To be his wife for all that time; then—suddenly—to learn the dreadful truth. Oh! Guy . . . Guy . . . how can men be so wicked?"

This was the part of the wrong which struck her imagination; the fifteen years of honour and happiness, with the man whom she had learned to love, followed by the rude discovery of his frightful treachery and her own position.

"You look good," said Virginia, piteously. "Can you tell me what I should do—I mean—do first? For, of course, I must never see him again. I never could. But there are other people. Lord Ferrier loves me, and will be made unhappy; Maude, his sister, loves me; Mrs. Hallows will want to know why I have broken the engagement; my guardian will want to know. What am I to say to all of them?"

"I do not know what ladies do, or how they should act. If I were you, I would say nothing. Say that Guy has broken the engagement. Refer them to him for reasons."

"But—you, will you not, go to Lord Ferrier yourself and tell him?"

"No. I promised him long ago, when he cursed the day that he married me, that I would not be the one to tell the story to his father. I have kept that promise, and I will keep it still, unless I have to break it—for the sake of the boy."

"Shall I leave you?" Violet asked, presently; "I think I can do nothing more for you. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" said Virginia. "Why, but for you, I might have married him."

This was a strange speech from a girl who had just been torn from her lover. But it might be taken in more senses than one.

Violet went away.

Left alone, Virginia went over the whole story again, trying to understand it thoroughly. It was, alas! too easy to understand. In place of the perfect gentleman, the Knight without Reproach, the pure Sir Galahad, there stood a Thing with contorted features, hideous, deceitful, a wild beast. Poor Maude! Poor Lord Ferrier! Who was to tell them?

She sat down quickly, and wrote a note.

"I have received a visit from Violet Lovelace, the actress. She has told me a story about you and your marriage with her. If that story is true, do not answer this letter. If it is not true, come and see me. Virginia."

She sent this letter by a special messenger. If Captain Ferrier was in his chambers he was to wait for an answer. If he was not, the man then was to go to his club and there wait for an answer. He was not to return until he had put the letter into Captain Ferrier's own hands. And, meantime, she was at home to no one.

It was nearly seven o'clock when the man returned.

He had given the letter. Captain Ferrier read it, tore it up into a great many fragments, and said, "Tell Miss Ferrier that there is no answer at all."

It was all true, then.

"Where is your ring, my dear?" asked Mrs. Hallows. "It is bad luck not to wear an engaged ring."

"My engagement is broken off," said Virginia.

"Your engagement broken off? My dearest child, what is the meaning of this?"

"Captain Ferrier has broken it off, dear Mrs. Hallows. Will you ask him—not me—the reason why? I have sent him back his presents, and there is an end."

"An end? Virginia, are you dreaming? Yesterday he was with you half the morning—was the engagement broken then?"

"No; not then, it has been broken to-day. You will ask him why, not me."

"Good Heavens!" said Mrs. Hallows.

"We are going out to-night," said Virginia. "I do not feel very much inclined for dancing, but we will go. And you will tell everybody, please, that the engagement is broken off. I wish particularly that this should be known at once."

"But—my dear"—

"It is quite true," Virginia repeated. "It is broken off so hopelessly that it can never . . . never . . . never be renewed. It is not a quarrel, nor a misunderstanding. It is an impossible thing for me to marry him."

"Have you told Maude?"

"I have written both to her and to Lord Ferrier, telling them that the engagement is broken. For their sake, I am very, very sorry. For my own"—

"For your own, dear?"

"For my own, I can never be sufficiently grateful and happy."

Mrs. Hallows said no more. It was clearly no mere lovers' quarrel. Besides, Captain Ferrier was not in love with Virginia, as she had the sharpness to have perceived very clearly from the beginning. The man wanted her fortune, and she had learned something of his character. He had no friends, although he knew many men; and he was a gambler. Could Virginia have learned that he was a gambler? That would hardly explain her statement that he himself had broken off the engagement. Could she have found out entanglements of another kind? But since he, and not she, had broken the engagement, that could scarcely be.

She was fairly puzzled.

Their little dinner that evening, usually so full of cheerfulness, was silent and dull. Presently they went to some party, where Virginia danced more than was usual with her. Mrs. Hallows, obedient to instructions, whispered the news, which was carried round; so that by the next morning there was not a single person interested in the career of the Honourable Guy Ferrier who did not know that his brilliant match was broken off. Virginia's letters to Lord Ferrier and to Maude were nearly alike. To the former she said,

"Dear Lord Ferrier,—Because you wished it, and because you have been so kind to me—kinder than I could ever have looked for or hoped—I am very sorry that Guy has broken off our engagement. He will, perhaps, tell you why.—Your grateful and affectionate cousin, VIRGINIE."

And to Maude she wrote:—

"My dear Maude,—Guy has broken the engagement. He will, if he pleases, tell you why; but I do not ask me. For your sake and your father's sake I am very sorry that it was ever entered upon. I will write to my guardian by the next mail. Meantime, please understand that it is impossible for us to renew the promise. I mean impossible in the literal sense of the word. It is not matter of sentiment at all. IMPOSSIBLE. Thank you most sincerely for your kindness and your friendship.—Yours, affectionately, VIRGINIE."

They received these letters sitting together after dinner. Lord Ferrier had been talking of Virginia—of the pleasant times they would have when she would be with them for good; making plans for their residence altogether; Guy settling down to a country gentleman. He talked constantly of Virginia; he longed for her to be married, so as to be at his side every day. While they were thus discoursing these letters came.

Lord Ferrier dropped the note in consternation.

"What does it mean, Maude? What does it mean?"

"It is some new folly of Guy's—some madness; I do not know what it means." She sprang to her feet in a kind of despair. "Oh! Guy . . . Guy! Then all is useless."

"What does it mean, Maude?"

"I do not know, Sir. Patience a little. We shall know—too soon—whenever the news reaches us; and too much, whatever the reason may be."

CHAPTER XI.



VIRGINIE would see Maude; but she refused to give any explanations.

"But, my dear, it is inexplicable. One day you are lovers, and the next you are strangers—and no reasons."

"There is a very good reason indeed," said Virginia. "But yet I cannot tell it you."

"You say that Guy broke it off. Why? It was his"—she was going to say 'his interest' but she refrained—"it was his dearest wish."

"Virginia smiled. "No," she said, "it was never his wish at all. Do not think

that any longer. He may have told you so; but it was not true. He never wished to marry me: he never loved me. For that matter, he hardly took the trouble to pretend."

"Oh! Virginia, is it, after all, only a lovers' quarrel?" It seemed, for the moment, as if she might be only piqued or out of temper.

"No: it is far worse than that. It is as I told you, an impossible thing for me ever to see him again. Ask him yourself."

Maude went to her brother's chambers. He was out: he had left no message: she went to his club, he had not been there at all: then she went home and wrote to him.

"Virginia will tell me nothing. What have you done, Guy? What have you said?"

He answered by letter and briefly.

"Since Virginia will tell you nothing, I do not see why I should, the thing is broken off; it can never be taken up again. I suppose there will be a smash in a day or two. Perhaps you had better tell my father everything."

Lord Ferrier found no pleasure that day in his studio, though the day was fine and the light good. He was painting a picture for Virginia; he was going to throw into it his very best work; it was to be a picture which even jealous Royal Academicians should not dare to refuse. Yet, if it could not be given to her, what was the use of going on with it? He, too, sought his son, but to no purpose, because Captain Ferrier was neither at his chambers nor his club. Then Lord Ferrier took luncheon at his own club, sat uneasily in the library over the magazines for an hour or two, reading, but remembering nothing. Then he thought he would try and see Virginia, and ask her about it himself.

"Virginia," he said, sadly, taking her hand, "tell me what it means. Am I not, in very truth, to call you daughter?"

"No," she replied, "I cannot become your daughter. But you must ask Guy to tell you the reason. He knows that it is impossible I should marry him; he has known it all along. Oh! why—why—did he ever try to persuade himself . . . it is incredible!"

"If you cannot tell me, my dear child," said Lord Ferrier, "I will not insist. It only remains for me to say how truly and deeply grieved I am at this blow."

"Oh! you have always been so kind to me, so very kind"—for the first time the girl began to cry about her broken engagement—"but I feel as if I were doing some dreadful ingratitude. Believe me, it is not my fault; indeed, indeed, it is not."

"I am sure it is not. The fault is wholly Guy's. Yet I lose a daughter; and it is very hard."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he left her, and went home and sat in his study, wondering by what sad fate the fruits and flowers which had promised to grace his old age were turning to dust and ashes. The older a man gets the greater need for him to have always something before him, something full of light, and sunshine, and warmth. Virginia was to be the source of light, and joy, and warmth to the old man. Now she was to go. This was a dreadful thing to think of. He looked very old and bowed when Maude stole into the room, and sat before him, her cheek upon her hand, and sorrow and shame written on her face.

"You bring no comfort, Maude," said her father.

"Poor child! It is hard for you as well as for me."

"No, Sir; no comfort, but—more trouble."

"Go on, my dear. Let me face the trouble—all the trouble that is in store for us. What fresh trouble?"

"It is no new trouble to me, Sir. The knowledge





DAVIDSON KNOWLES, DEL.

R. AND E. TAYLOR, SC.

"She went on before, with parted lips and eager eyes, thinking of how she should find them all."—Part II., Chap. XIV.

of it has been my constant companion for long years. I have done my best to keep it from you; but now it can be kept no longer."

"What is it, Maude? What is this burden that I am not to share?"

"It is concerned with Guy. My dear father"—she threw herself at his feet in tears of pity and of shame—"do you know the manner of man that your son is?"

"What is he, Maude?"

"He says I am to tell you all; well—I will take him at his word. I will hide nothing from you. He is a hopeless gambler; he has lost year after year all the money he could get from you, all he could get from me; he has paid none of his tradesmen during all these years; he has raised all the money that could be raised by . . . by . . . the ways in which such money is raised. Do you understand all that I mean?"

"I believe I understand it all, Maude. What more?" His hand, which he laid upon her head, trembled, though his voice was firm.

"He has come to the end of everything. Unless he can raise within a few days some fifteen thousand pounds for immediate wants, including debts of honour, he will be made a bankrupt—and worse."

"He wants fifteen thousand pounds for immediate necessities." Lord Ferrier repeated the words slowly. "How much more will he want? What is the amount that he must raise?"

"I do not know."

"Is there anything more to learn, Maude?"

"No; I have told you all. Except the amount of his debts."

"Is this the reason why Virginie will not marry him?"

"I suppose so. I know no other reason. I am glad that the engagement is broken. It was my doing. I pressed Guy to clear himself by this rich marriage. I thought that we might save you from knowing anything. Yet I have had no happy moment since, for thinking of the wretched fate I had prepared for that poor girl."

"Thank you, Maude." Her father spoke quietly, as if unmoved, as if it was a thing demanding attention, but not disaster.

"Leave me now. I must think over what I ought to do."

He sat thinking all the summer afternoon. He was never, himself, an ambitious man, but the Ferriers, from father to son, continually looked for the advent of that Ferrier who was going to lead his country to victory and triumph. He thought sadly of the hopes he had formed about his only son, the bright and beautiful boy who was going to be the greatest Ferrier of the line. These hopes had long since been dim, but they had never been altogether quenched; there was no reason why his son should not leave the Army and enter upon a political career, though as yet he had shown no ambition. He had no tastes: this was a thing which his father had long lamented, but never understood till now. For when the passion for play seizes upon a man it leaves no room for tastes of any kind. You cannot possibly serve God and Mammon. And of all men in the world the player spends most time and most thought over Mammon. He openly worships him. Now, even a buyer and seller of stocks has his Sundays.

As he pondered what would be best to do, a thought grew gradually in his brain, slowly taking shape, like a spectre, that there was only one thing left to do. If all the money was raised that could be raised—of course this meant—on the reversionary interests; if there was no other way—there was still the last resource; he could, with his son's consent, bar the entail and sell everything—even The Towers. And so an end of all!

He took some action; he wrote to his son, saying coldly that he had learned from Maude some of his difficulties. He ordered him to go at once to the family lawyers and draw up a complete statement of all his liabilities of every kind; and he added that until this were done, and some order taken with his affairs, Guy need not present himself.

That night Guy made his last appearance at the Green Grass Club; where he generally found the Baccarat he loved so well.

Serious play generally begins about eleven, though there is a little irregular practice—a little duelling, at *écarté*—before then. It is about midnight that the members drop in from their various haunts, and take their places one after the other. Some of them were little more than mere boys, though their conversation was "grown-up," and their knowledge of life—that is, some form of life—was precocious. Guy was one of the older men; he was so very old that he did not quite talk their slang. This is, indeed, a kind of tongue, like the purest Parisian of society, which changes every season. Besides, what to the young fellows fired with champagne, and inexperienced in arithmetic, was pure fun and merriment, was to Ferrier and some like him sober and serious business. What were only couters and ponies and monkeys to the lads, mere abstract sums of money, which they might lose or win without any difference, as they fondly thought, to themselves, were to the older men the means of satisfying ravenous creditors, meeting bills, and taking up promissory notes. The lads laughed and chattered about Regie and Freddy and Nelly and Connie and, generally, Jack and Jill; and told stories, and drank more champagne, and smoked cigarettes, and told more stories, and drank still more

champagne; while the older hands kept cool, and watched the chances.

Guy was at first in bad luck. Before midnight he lost three hundred pounds. Then he began to win again, and won all back, and a hundred and fifty more. This was three o'clock. He thought he had won enough, and would go home.

Now, there is an institution at the Green Grass Club—a very useful little institution to young men who desire to be swiftly and suddenly stripped. It consists of a buffet, where one can find light refreshments, with champagne, or brandy-and-soda. Guy was a little exhausted with the excitement of the game. He drank the greater part of a whole bottle.

Then one of the boys began talking to him.

"Let us go back," said this youth. "It's my day out; and I've lost a thou. But you're in luck, old chappie; you are not going to desert your luck."

He went back; it was as if a rope dragged him to the table; he sat down and went on with the play.

They left off at seven. The sun had been up for four hours; the morning was bright and hot; there were lots of people already in the streets. And Guy had lost fifteen hundred pounds.

He walked home to his chambers in a kind of dream.

There were letters on the table—from Maude, she had told her father all; from his father—he knew all, and ordered him to make out his list; from certain gentlemen of the money-lending and bill-discounting business, their language was forcible rather than kind; from tradesmen; from "friends," who held his I. O. U.s. The smash had come. Well; it had been coming a long time. It had been deferred by his engagement; but already everybody knew that it was off.

"As it has come," said Guy, "I shall go to bed. Curious; I wonder what will happen—What is this?"

It was only a little packet—with a ring and a bracelet—trifles which he had given Virginie.

He laughed as he put them into his pocket.

"Marrying would have been a deadly bore," he said. "I wonder how she took it. Nasty thing facing Violet, if she let herself rip. But perhaps she put her case quietly. One never knows what they will do. Pity, too, for some reasons, that it didn't come off."

He had had his last fling in that paradise of flinging youth, London. Paris has its points. New York has its corners. But for red-hot continued flinging there is, perhaps, no capital in the word like London. Now, as the first rule among the joyous companies is that he who flings must pay, it may be very well understood that Guy Ferrier was seen no more at his club or among any of his former associates. Nor do they at this moment know what has become of him!

CHAP. XII.

POOR TOM!

Smash was quite as complete as any that has ever

been enjoyed by Prodigal Son. The thing is generally very much dreaded before it comes; yet it has its enjoyable points while it lasts. Nobody is so important during the conduct of his case as the bankrupt. It is afterwards,

when the eyes of the world are no longer upon him, that the flatness sets in. Guy Ferrier felt, on the whole, happier when the crisis had arrived, though he could no longer go to his clubs, and though he had to spend a part of each day with lawyers, making out a list of liabilities which showed a really sublime contempt for the rules of addition, multiplication, and compound interest. Yet no man can afford to disregard science, and the end of such as do is certain.

It was, indeed, a noble list, regarded only as what a young man with but a small allowance and expectations of a moderate kind can achieve in ten years. The contemplation of it raised a kind of rapture in the minds of those who read it. One felt proud of one's country, since it can produce such heroes in prodigality; and one marvelled at the man who could calmly see the whole of these thousands thrown headlong into the sea, getting nothing for them at all except the usual wage of the spendthrift, now about to be paid to him.

There is one way, and only one way, in which such a list in such a case can be met and discharged. It is a complicated way, and involves all kinds of other things; but in its broad principle it is simple. The way is for the heir and the tenant in possession to unite in barring the entail. When this is done, the family acres may be sold and the debts paid. It is a cruel way, because it destroys the House. The only way in which a family is kept together, and kept in the front place won by their ancestors, is by their lands and by their title. The latter cannot be sold, but the former can, and a penniless Lord may hide his head, and let the title die. The longer the line, the older the house, the more cruel a thing it is; for a man whose ambitions lay not in his

own achievements but in those of the future, the thing was most dreadful.

Lord Ferrier accepted the position. His house was ruined. They could never again lift up their heads; his son was hopeless; they must save his honour somehow, if that could be done, and then find some quiet corner where, with his daughter, he could, sad and sorrowful, wait the end of his days.

"Go, Maude," he said; "go to take your last look at The Towers. I have no heart to go. When the papers are signed we shall be homeless. Perhaps we may somehow save enough from the wreck to live upon in some humble way."

He knew, now, that his daughter's fortune was gone long before—thrown by his son as a sop to his creditors. They had no longer any secrets.

"Perhaps, Maude," he said, with a smile; "perhaps people may believe that I *can* paint, after all. We may sell the pictures."

He uttered no reproaches, and made no complaints. Everything that he loved the most had come to ruin and wreck; he was going to lose all that he least looked to lose; through no fault of his. A hard and cruel case; somehow made worse by the knowledge that the man who had done the mischief was dead to repentance, and grieved only for himself.

Once, Maude asked him if he would see Guy. He made no reply, but he shuddered.

As for Guy, he showed no sign of wishing to see anybody. He vanished. He was no more seen; he could not go to his club until his debts of honour were paid; he did not appear in any of his usual haunts. But he had some sense of honour left. He wrote to all and told them—what they knew already—that he was in a mess, and that his affairs were in his lawyer's hands. With that they were fain to be content. But many men, men of small means and vaulting ambition, who liked to play with those who could lose without caring much, and who looked for a prompt settlement of such claims, swore loudly and felt badly about Captain Ferrier.

I think that in those days he went o' nights to a certain obscure corner which exists in Soho. A good many curious and interesting things go on in that *quartier*. One hears stories from time to time; but it is difficult to get such an introduction to those houses as will allay suspicion, and gentlemen of the press would probably find themselves a hindrance rather than otherwise to the programme of the evening. At the house which Guy found out, a few Russians, Frenchmen, and other foreigners, chiefly of low degree, meet nightly and dally in a small way with the Goddess of Chance. Captain Ferrier was not particular about his company, so that he could get the excitement which is to some souls as necessary as ardent drink to others. He was happy if he came away the winner of a sovereign; he cursed his luck if he lost five shillings; he came the earliest and left the latest. He had given up his chambers, and lived at a small hotel, whose address was known only to his lawyers, and I think that he was happier in those days, living in this hole-and-corner way, punting for sixpences, than when he was plunging for hundreds and looking forward to the crisis. There was no champagne, but there was brandy-and-water.

In those days Percival plucked up heart of grace and called often upon Virginie; and they took counsel together. It was well on in July; the season was nearly over. Mrs. Hallows, who went in sadness, having lost the most important persons on her visiting-list, was talking of the sea-side. But Virginie had other thoughts in her head. She had not yet written to her mother and her guardian about the breaking of the engagement, which lasted but a short fortnight. She was thinking of another and a more excellent way of telling them.

It was concerning the more excellent way that Percival advised her. His arguments were forcible; and he spoke with plainness, and to no unwilling ears.

"Why stay here?" he asked her. "Everything in London will remind you of—of—things you would gladly forget. You have endured a most cruel outrage at the hands of your own people. London will never be a happy place for you again."

"No: never," she replied. "I can never think of London again except with pain. And I shall always remember Lord Ferrier's kindness."

"Go out yourself," he went on. "The mail starts in a fortnight. Carry yourself the news of your freedom."

She clasped her hands and her eyes sparkled.

"Then there is Tom," the tempter added softly.

She blushed, but replied not.

"You do not know"—he pleaded the name of the absent Tom as warmly as if it were his own—"you cannot understand the perfect love with which he looks upon you. As for me and the rest of us, of course you know already that we love you just as much; but Tom of course comes first."

"Oh! Mr. Percival," said Virginie, with a rosy blush upon her cheek and a sweet smile in her eyes, "you must not say such things to me." Yet in Palmiste, such things had been said to her without meeting any objections.

"You will let me say such things, Virginie, because I am an old admirer, and you know that I do not presume any farther—while Tom is in the way, for Tom is different: he has watched you grow up beside him: his love is a part of his being: without you he is



imperfect: you have been his companion from the time you could run about: you lisped his name almost the first of any: you have felt his affection about you and around you from the beginning. Virginie, is it possible that you could forget him?"

"I have never forgotten him," she said. "How could I ever forget him?"

"Yet you promised yourself to another."

"Yes," she said, humbly. "But still I had not forgotten him. Can you not understand that he was always my brother?"

"No, I cannot. Because, you see, he never was. People may call themselves brothers and sisters as much as they please, but they cannot create that relationship by any amount of calling. And if you loved him still, how could you?"

"I never loved my cousin at all," said Virginie. "Do not think worse of me than I deserve. I respected the man whose character Maude described; and they were very kind to me; and Lord Ferrier loved me; and it was what my father would have liked."

"Then, now that you are free, now that you can do so, remember the only man who has the right to ask you for your hand."

"You forget," she said, gently, "that things are not as they were. He has lost his faith in me. If he entertained—those feelings—once—they must have been destroyed—by myself. What respect can he have left for a girl who engaged herself—as I did—to such a man? I cannot explain to him as I have explained to you."

"He will know that you were deceived; he will say to himself that you"—

"Yes, he will make excuses for me; but can he ever think again—as he did before?"

"You would not ask that question if you knew and could understand what a man's love is. Virginie, it isn't a question of whether he thinks a little better or a little worse of you. All that is nothing. He loves you. Whatever you did, he would love you still. If you were to lose your beauty, he would love you still. If you were to go away and desert him for a hundred and fifty years, he would love you just as much when you came back. It isn't your beauty, or your grace, or your virtue, or your sweetness that he loves; it is yourself."

"Has he told you all this?"

"No; he never talked about you."

"How, then, do you know it?"

"Because, Virginie, I know the man; and because I judge him by myself. For I love you in just about the same way myself. You are my ideal woman, as you are his."

The tears came into her eyes.

"What," she asked, "can a woman say or do that is worthy of this gift of love? You, who judge him by yourself, plead for him. Heaven knows it wants little pleading. You are so generous and so loyal to him that I cannot but do your will. It shall be as you desire."

"Elsie," he said in the evening—they were taking a stroll in the cool and leafy lanes of Battersea Park; it was nearly nine o'clock, and the sweet breath of summer was in the air. "Elsie, I have had an agitated day."

"Has your novel gone wrong, then?"

"No; there are one or two things even more important than the novel, though that will prove an Epoch-maker. What I was engaged upon was more important. You know, of course, Elsie, that I have always been in love with Virginie."

"Yes, you have told me so a thousand times."

"Have I really? So often? Yet it is a delightful subject to talk about—nothing more so. Being in love, then, and fully acquainted with the various phases of that interesting passion, I judge of Tom's feelings by my own."

"Yes; that seems natural—if Tom does feel like you."

"Of course he does. Now, consider the case. The young lady has suffered a great wrong; but things might have been much worse, because she might have been in love with the man who did the wrong. That, I am happy to say, is not the case. Not at all. She never really cared a straw about him; she has been insulted and outraged by the abominable wickedness of the creature, but her deeper feelings are untouched. Now, here is Tom's chance. Therefore I went there this morning to plead his cause."

"Why not your own, since you love her so much?"

"You are a foolish child, Elsie. I told you that Tom must come first. And, after a great deal of beating about the bush, because one never quite knows in what light the thing is regarded by the person one is trying to persuade, I succeeded."

"Yes, Elsie," he continued triumphantly, "Virginie will marry Tom. That is the news I have to tell you."

"And you?"

"Why, I go on just the same. It has been a great happiness to me to love this sweet and beautiful woman. She will always remain to me the crown of womanhood. Perhaps I should be almost afraid of marrying her. Perhaps it is better to worship at a distance."

"Perhaps," said Elsie, a little jealously, "you might find out that she is not altogether the goddess you think."

"And what a dreadful thing that would be to discover!" said Percival. "Now, if I marry a girl whom

I know not to be a goddess, that would be better, wouldn't it?"

"I should think so," said Elsie, blushing—she hardly knew why. But nobody was there to see it, so it didn't matter.

"Yes; much better. If, for instance, you and I were to marry."

"Oh! Mr. Percival."

"If you would not be jealous, and think that because I have loved Virginie I cannot find any love for you—but I thought you ought to know the whole truth."

"Oh! Mr. Percival. What will Violet say?"

"You are a very dear and good little Elsie. We will go into that partnership, then. I've got no money; you've got no money. We will club our resources. And perhaps we needn't move our quarters. And now, my child, as there is nobody in this lane but ourselves, put up your lips and let me kiss you, and tell me that you won't be jealous. Petrarch always made them say that."

CHAPTER XIII.



AM come," said Maude, "to ask you to forgive me, Virginie, before you go."

She looked pale and worn; her thin cheek was thinner; her

eyes more lustrous and more sorrowful. Sad stories in plenty have been written on the wreck of women's lives made by lover and by husband, but few of them which have been ruined by brother or by father; yet are these the

more common. Maude Ferrier gave her brother everything: her thoughts, her work, her money, yet the end was—this.

"I am come to ask your forgiveness," she repeated.

"Indeed," said Virginie, "I have nothing to forgive. You have always been most kind and good to me."

"My goodness and kindness, Virginie, were assumed, for my brother's sake. I wanted him to marry you for the sake of your money. I wrote to him in Palmiste, urging him to pay court to you. It was I knew that he was in difficulties, and a gambler; I knew well that he would only be relieved for a time, and that he would throw away your fortune as he has thrown away his own. You were to be sacrificed to his selfish greed and prodigality, as well as I myself. It was a cruel and a wicked thing to plot."

"But you told me"—

"All I told you was false. I said Guy was an honourable and a noble gentleman, as the Chief of our House has always been. It was false. He is cold and selfish, cruel and treacherous. This I knew. I was preparing you for the most cruel of disappointments. I deliberately laid my plans for you to become the wife of a reckless gambler. But, remember, my father knew nothing of it. Think ill of me, because I deserve it; but not of him, because he is the soul of honour. I have told him, now. When you found him out what were your thoughts of me?"

"But, Maude, I have not found him out. This is the first I have heard of his money difficulties or his gaming."

"Why, then, was the engagement broken off. Is there worse to come?"

"There is worse to come, but I cannot tell you what it is."

"To save him even for a year or two; to keep my father from knowing the reputation and character of his son—I think I would have sacrificed any one. Yet—Virginie—I am glad that you are saved; and again I say—forgive me."

"I forgive you, Maude. Whatever you did, was for your brother. I know already that he is not—the noble character I thought him. But what do you mean by ruin?"

"His liabilities are enormous; it is truly wonderful that he should have been trusted so greatly; to meet them my father has consented to the only course left open; he will cut off the entail and sell The Towers, and the estates, and the town house and all; and so there will be an end of us."

"Sell The Towers? Sell the estates? Is it possible?"

"It is more than possible. The papers are ready, and will be signed to-morrow morning."

"Oh! Maude, it must not be. Cannot some of my fortune"—

"Yours, Virginie? Ask yourself if we could take your money—when we have wronged you so cruelly."

Virginie was silent. No; her own money could not be taken.

"To-morrow morning my father will see his son, but only for the signing of the papers, and then . . . then . . . oh! me . . . me . . . there will be no more pride for us, except in the past, and only poverty and shame for the future."

"Maude!"

They wept together, and parted.

Now when, an hour later, Percival heard of this intention he fell into a great dubiety. For, first of all, he had no right to interfere; but, secondly, he had been taken into confidence by a person greatly interested in this barring of entail; and, thirdly, he thought that if the truth were made known to Lord Ferrier, he might reconsider a decision which would make his grandson a pauper. Finally, he decided on advising Violet to take the boy and go herself to her father-in-law.

"I promised," said the actress, "that I would keep his secret—and I have done so. Nobody knows—except that poor child with the pretty face. But for the sake of the boy I would break that promise, or any other that I have ever made."

"It is for his sake that I advise you to break it. You ought never to have made such a promise at all."

"What do you say, Daddy?"

"It looks well," he said, . . . "a lawyer's office—table with parchments"—

"It won't be parchment," Percival objected. "It will be paper."

"Permit me, Mr. Percival, to know my business. On the stage, wills and agreements and so forth must be on parchment—large, rustling parchment. I will proceed"—

He indicated by a sweep of his hand that the scene was set. "At the table the lawyer, holding a pen—a large goose-quill—the introduction of steel pens has ruined the old goose-quill business—utterly destroyed it. Ah! what business have I seen in the good old farces got out of a simple quill pen! At the end of the table the prodigal, arms folded, brows knit—a prodigal at bay—most effective figure I assure you. Enter the father, bowed with years and grief, supported by his lovely daughter, who gazes reproachfully upon her brother."

"Will your Lordship sign?"

"Give me," he says, feebly, "give me the pen. Thus . . . thus . . . I sign away—for ever—the honour of the House."

"He dips the pen into the ink; he raises his hand. The door flies open—'Do not sign, my Lord!' Tableau! Very good indeed, Violet, my dear. It makes up for the loss of that other beautiful situation which you threw away. After all, it would not have taken place for sixteen years, and one does not know where I may be in sixteen years. Starring in the provinces, very likely."

It did seem a very likely thing indeed, considering that he was already over eighty; but then Art knows nought of age.

"I think you ought to go, indeed," said Percival. "If you will allow me, I will go with you, unless Mr. Perigal would like to go."

"I would rather go alone," said Violet. "And the boy shall go too."

The papers were to be signed at noon. Guy was instructed to be in the study at that time; he was also informed that his father refused to speak to him, that he was to go away on the conclusion of the inquiry, and that he would be afterwards informed what provision, if any, would be made for him. The last clause was uncomfortable, because men who are the heirs to great names are not accustomed to consider even the possibility of a failure in the corn and wine, the butter and the oil, and the honey, which go to the daily bread. "If any!"—but, of course, it could be only a figure of speech.

It was a little after eleven when Violet asked to see Lord Ferrier. She refused to send in her name, but said that she came on business of the utmost importance, and wished to see his Lordship immediately. She was taken to the study, where she waited, and wondered how her communication would be received.

Presently Lord Ferrier appeared. Not quite the man Violet expected—she somehow thought he would be a fierce, baronial kind of person, with the air of one who insists on all his rights; a French Seigneur of the good old time—though she knew little about Seigneurs; a melodramatic Lord, with large, white, fierce eyebrows. On the contrary, he seemed quite a mild and gentle old man, who bowed politely, and apologised for keeping her waiting, and asked what her business with him might be, and added that he was himself much engaged at the moment, and would be obliged if she would come to the point at once.

"Your business, my Lord," said Violet, "is connected with your son?"

"It is."

"You are about to sign an agreement which will enable you to sell your property—all your property—for the purpose of paying off your son's debts."

"I am; though I do not know how you have learned this."

"Never mind that. I am thinking, my Lord, how I had best put into words the things that I have to tell you. I am here in hope of inducing you to reconsider that decision."

Lord Ferrier rose.

"Madam," he said, "I cannot discuss this decision, or any other private concerns of mine, with a stranger."



MONTARD, DEL.

E. AND H. TAYLOR, SO.

"Sometimes they sat beside a sparkling stream, upon some fallen trunk, and watched the flickering of the leaves in the sunlight."—Part II., Chap. XIV.



MR. ALTAR BESANT.

THE AUTHORS.

THE LATE MR. JAMES RICK.

"Yet, you will listen to me, directly you know who I am. It is only since yesterday that I have understood the meaning of your Lordship's intention. Otherwise I should have been here long ago."

"I am at a loss to know"—

"You shall know directly. I have been told that your Lordship is a . . . a . . . what they call . . . I am told . . . a tenant for life of the property which you hold."

"That is so, certainly."

"And that your son, when he succeeds, is also a tenant for life."

"Yes."

"So that if you agree between you to sell it you will be selling the property of your grandchildren."

"If you put it in that way—yes. But I have no grandchildren."

Violet had been holding the little boy by the hand; his back was turned to the window, so that his face was in shade. She now turned him round and pushed him gently forward.

"Does your Lordship," she asked, "see any likeness in that boy to any of your own family?"

It had been Violet's boast when she wrote to her husband that the boy was not like him. That was only true in part. The boy was exactly like what his father had been at his age.

"It is Guy himself!" cried Lord Ferrier. "The boy is like Guy at six. What does this mean?"

"Your Lordship has one grandchild. That is what it means. I am your son's wife."

"Is it possible?"

"You do not, naturally, accept my statement. Wait. Your son will be here himself in a short time. Let him be witness. I was married to him six years ago, and separated from him five years ago. It was an unlucky day for me when I met your son."

"Is it possible?"

His eyes were fixed on the child. "I am an actress. I play under the name of Violet Lovelace."

"Is it possible?"

He kept repeating these words.

"My Lord, have no doubt that I shall prove what I say. Will you make the future Lord Ferrier a pauper?"

"The future Lord Ferrier. Yes . . . yes . . . The future Lord Ferrier. Then the house will have another chance. But, if the child is not a pauper, his father will be dishonoured."

Violet laughed.

"Is he not dishonoured already? Has he not engaged himself to a young lady, hoping that I should keep silence? Did he not come to me and threaten, if I did not keep silence, to take away the boy and rob me of my salary? What constitutes dishonour among gentlemen, if these things do not? I say nothing of the cruel treatment and bitter words that drove me from him as soon as my baby was born. I say nothing of being left to earn my bread as best I might, and keep the child as well. It all forms part of the man. If this is not dishonour, Heaven knows what it is."

"Let me look at you," he said.

She raised her veil, and looked up in his face.

"The eyes," he said, "are honest eyes. You have a good face."

She blushed. She had not blushed for years; but now she blushed like an innocent, ignorant school-girl.

"My Lord," she said, earnestly, "my child has no cause to be ashamed of his mother, unless he is ashamed that she is an actress."

"It is well said," he replied, gravely.

Then he rang the bell, and desired that Miss Ferrier should be asked to come to him.

"Maude," he said, simply, "this young lady informs me that she is—your brother's wife—and that this is his son. If this be true—as I have very little doubt"—

"At least, Sir, let us first prove it to be true."

"Let us prove it to be true," echoed Violet. She was gentle and soft with the man; but with this woman who looked at her with cold distrust she became herself cold and distrustful. She drew the child upon her lap. "I shall prove that you, Miss Ferrier, are my sister-in-law."

"Will you, then, take your proofs to the proper persons, our lawyers?" asked Maude.

"No; I will not. I will wait here till my husband comes, he will prove himself the truth of my statement. Your Lordship will understand that I am here for no other purpose than to defend my son's rights. Your nephew"—she addressed herself to Maude with some asperity of manner—"may become an actor. I believe none of his predecessors have ever followed this profession."

Maude sighed. She did not doubt the story. A foolish marriage was only one more episode in the history of her brother, and a most natural episode.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Then Lord Ferrier spoke.

"If it be as you say," he said, slowly, "I will respect the boy's rights at the expense of his father."

Violet made no reply. Then there was silence again.

The clock struck twelve. And at the moment, true to the time appointed, the lawyer bearing the paper arrived; with him, Guy himself.

He started at the sight of Violet.

"You here?" he cried. "You have broken your promise."

"Who is this lady, Sir?" asked Lord Ferrier.

He looked from one to the other. He remembered the witnesses to the marriage; further concealment was hopeless; besides, it was useless.

"She is my wife," he said, "and this, I suppose, is the boy."

"It is the boy," said Violet. "I have the other proofs, but . . . is your Lordship satisfied?"

"I am satisfied," Lord Ferrier replied.

"First, then, you will sign this paper"—Violet addressed her husband, not Lord Ferrier. "You acknowledge that you married me under the assumed name of Richard Johnson. That is all. But I wish you to sign it in the presence of your father and your sister."

"If that is all," said Guy, carelessly, "let us sign."

He read the paper, signed it, and returned it to her, with a bow. "I suppose," he said, "that we part again. Quite so. You have not kept your promise; but do not fear: I shall not interfere with you."

"Give me, if you please," said Lord Ferrier to the lawyer, "the agreement which I was to sign. I have decided, Sir," he said to his son, "not to execute this deed. I will not join you in barring the entail. The estates shall be kept—for your son. I think I have no more to say to you. Stay. You will learn in a few days what I can do for you. An allowance of some kind shall be made to you, on the condition that you leave England and do not return in my lifetime. As regards your creditors, I shall see what sum I can set aside every year, so long as I live, for their use. Go; let me forget that ever I had a son."

The young man turned and left the room without a word.

"Guy!" cried Maude, catching his hand, but he shook it off with an angry gesture. He had not even a single kind word of farewell for the woman who had given him all she had. She sank into her chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"My dear," said Lord Ferrier, taking Violet's hand and raising it to his lips, "you are my daughter-in-law. In this house you will be always welcome."

"Thank you, my Lord. My secret shall still be kept. I will not take your name to the theatre, and I will go on working for myself. As for the boy, when

he is older you shall decide about him. Boy, kiss your grandfather."

She held up the child to be kissed.

"I will go, now. Do not cry for your brother," she said to Maude. "He is not worth a tear. I haven't cried about him for more than five years."

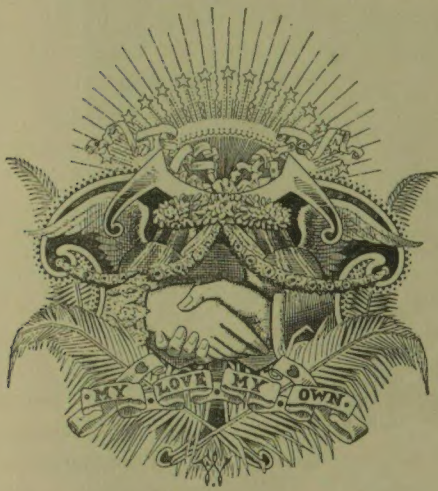
But Maude made no sign, and Violet walked away, leading the boy with her.

So Guy passed away, and will be seen no more. Nor can one say what will be his end. Where cards and dice and roulette-tables are to be found he will make his home. That is quite certain. It is also certain that he will descend, slowly or rapidly, deeper and deeper, until the outward semblance of a gentleman is lost. As one thinks of him and his future, one remembers stories of Mexican hells and New Orleans gambling saloons, and of shots fired across a table, and a dead body thrown into the street. Or one remembers ghastly things that one has heard: how men have fallen among thieves and swindlers, and cast in their lot with them, and become leaders among them, owing to the rare possession of a well-bred manner. Or one thinks of the despair that falls upon a man when his last sou is lost, and the cold river is close by.

Soon or late, the end of such men is certain.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AUSPICIOUS DAY.



THE cold season in Palmiste Island somewhat resembles the summer in the Straits of Belleisle. That is to say, while the latter begins on August the 31st and ends on September the 1st, the former is said to begin on

June the 30th and to end on July the 1st. It should be called the "not-so-hot-as-usual" season. In the very height—or depth—of the season was Virginie married.

Her return to the island was announced by no letters: she arrived alone and unexpected. There were few passengers by the mail, and hardly anyone came on board when the quarantine boat had done its duty. Therefore Virginie, leaving her boxes and things to be forwarded by the trusty purser, landed by herself, and by herself drove to Mon Désir.

It was in the afternoon, about five of the clock, that she arrived at the dear old Avenue of Palms. All the way out she had been living over again the tumult and humiliation of the last weeks in England. When she landed in the old familiar place her London season vanished, and became like a dream of the past. The sunshine lay upon the everlasting hills, the fresh breeze of the afternoon fanned her cheek, the ragged old banana-trees waved a welcome to her with their torn and disreputable rags of leaves. On the wharves the dusky coolies shouted as they ran backwards and forwards with their odorous sacks of guano; the merchants and the brokers sat beneath the trees upon the Place; the drivers slept upon their boxes; the mules kicked and bit each other; once more she heard the old Creole patois; once more she felt herself a Creole, and, as the carriage took her beyond the town, the tears came to her eyes. What was England to her but a name and a glory? What was he: pride of family worth any more to her? What had been the vague wonders in her mind before she saw the birthplace of her father? How was she changed? How little it all meant now. What were London drawing-rooms—what was the talk of London society—what were the false friendships and pretences of English life—what were the nights in crowded ball-rooms—to the sweet, pure air of the Palmiste table-land; the rustle and the light, the colour and the shadow of the waving canes, the wooded hill sides, the bare, hot rocks; the breadth of sunshine, the deep ravines, the waterfalls, and mountain streams; even the ugly wooden huts, with their tin roofs, of the Chinamen—in her native land?

When the carriage reached the avenue, she stopped it, and, telling the man to follow very slowly, she went on before with parted lips and eager eyes, thinking of how she should find them all.

Oh! Look. In the verandah there sat, as they always had sat, side by side, her mother with Madame Kemyss. They were not reading—what real good comes by reading, when you think of it? Nor were they talking—you do not do any good at all, in general, by talking. Nor were they working—why should they work, when they had people to work for them? On a table between them lay a book or two, and some work, just to look at. They were sitting there as they sat every afternoon, quite still, silent, and happy, enjoying the sunshine as it sloped across the lawn and lay golden on the distant hills, feeling the joy of the cloudless sky, and the breath of the fragrant air, and the scent of the roses on the lawn. Why talk? Why argue? Why waste breath in trying to prove the unknowable, when these things can be enjoyed? Needless work, fuss, prattle, chatter, fierce argument, and strenuous logic are for temperate zones. To these ladies there was nothing wanting in their lives but the return of their Virginie. And she was close at hand, though they knew it not, looking at them through the branches of an acacia.

The Squire was there, too. But one is ashamed to say that he was asleep. He had been of late so much troubled and afflicted about the estate and the hesitation of the Banks that he often



fell asleep of an afternoon. Now he lay back in his long chair and slumbered peacefully.

In a corner of the verandah sat old Suzette, in her cotton frock and red turban, coiled up. In her hands was a piece of work; but she, too, was half asleep.

A sleepy, peaceful place. As Virginie looked, she thought of the danger hanging over them, and how this peace might be interrupted, this rest disturbed, and these dear old people sent adrift to find such shelter as they might. To be sure, where her mother lived, there would be Madam Kemyss—there, too, the Squire. But—Tom!

And she blushed, because, during all the voyage, Tom had never once been out of her thoughts. What would he say? What would he say?

Now, at this juncture, Tom himself came sauntering slowly down the avenue. He was dull because the house was dull, and its silence almost intolerable to him. And in these days he was always dejected, and found no joy in anything nor any brightness in the sunshine. And, behold! before him stood none other than—Virginie!

He took her in his arms, and, without a word of question or explanation—perhaps he read her eyes—he kissed her a thousand times, regardless of the driver who sat on his box and grinned approvingly.

"Oh! Tom," she cried, "do you love me still?"

Did he love her? Did the sun shine? Was the sky blue? Were the flowers growing under their feet? Did he love her still?

And there were present at the wedding his Excellency the Governor and her Ladyship, his illustrious consort;

also the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Palmiste, with the young Padre, his Examining Chaplain—it took the pair of them to read the service—and the Bishopess, and the Bishoplings and the Colonial Secretary, and the Auditor-General and the Treasurer, and all the Heads of Departments—with their wives and daughters; also all the members of the Legislative Council, with their wives and their sons and their daughters, and their grandchildren; and the General in command of the Forces, and the Colonel and all the officers of the Regiment in garrison; and the Assistant Colonial Secretary—he who had taken the Padre for a morning walk—and other assistants in Departments; and all the French and English merchants, and as many of the planters as were white—you mustn't mix colours in a tropical climate any more than in æsthetic zones; and among them the McAndrew and the McLoughlin. As for the Pink Boy, he was there, too. His friend the Squire was saved from ruin. His letter had been acted upon; and, after all, this was the sad and fatal result. Yet he bore up, and acted as best man, looking very pink and young and handsome.

They were married, naturally, at the English Cathedral, which was much fuller than was ever before known in the memory of man, except on St. John's Day, when the Masons go there to solemn service, and hear a sermon full of dark allusion to Masonic rites, and feel reassured about that Greater Excommunication hurled at them by my Lord the Bishop of the Older Branch, whose Palace stands not a hundred yards away. The organ pealed continuously, and the choir boys sang an anthem, and the service was presently under weigh, and the Pink Boy and all the bridesmaids were in tears.

After the service there was the most generous and noble banquet ever spread, with culinary effects romantically tropical, artistically suggestive of sugar planting, poetically, allegorically beautiful. His Right Reverence proposed the bride: his Excellency proposed Captain Kemyss: the Assistant Colonial Secretary, himself a bachelor, proposed the bridesmaids, and the Pink Boy in reply wandered off to the bride and confessed his passion: and the McAndrew went to sleep in the middle of the feast: and the McLoughlin at the close had to be supported by a friend on either side.

They spent their honeymoon in a little shooting-box hidden in the heart of the woods, where they wandered every day hand in hand. Sometimes they sat beside a sparkling stream, upon some fallen trunk, and watched the flickering of the leaves in the sunlight, or the herds of deer browsing in a lonely glade, in silent happiness. Sometimes they gathered orchids and ferns. Sometimes Virginie would read to Tom, who never read anything for himself. Sometimes she told him of the great world she

had seen for a little and left for ever. Once she told him the story of her engagement, and honest Tom was fain to own that the wickedness of a man may be very astonishing. He meant white man—because he knew the coloured varieties pretty well, and had gauged their moral possibilities. Sometimes they came upon little clearings inhabited by settlements of old maroons who had long since forgotten their rancour against the white man, and among whom there was now none living, unless some very old Patriarch, who remembered the lash and the labour. Then the fair white lady sat among them, and talked to the simple people.

A sweet and simple honeymoon; the prelude to a sweet and simple life. Perhaps Virginie will be happier with her garden and her flowers, her woods and hills, her sunshine and peace, than if she were the Lady of The Towers, even though her husband were the Bayard that Maude represented him to be.

Another wedding; it was so obscure that I do not know on what day it was held; but it was about the same time as Virginie's. That of Mr. Percival and Elsie. Nobody was present except Daddy Perigal and Violet and the boy. They have, as they proposed, clubbed their resources. Elsie is to go on governessing, while her husband shapes that spoon. It will never, I think, be a very remarkable spoon; but there will be some neatness and freshness in the design, some taste, with conscientiousness in the execution; and the whole of the man's heart will be thrown into his work, so that, perhaps, there may presently happen to be found a few simple people who will look upon the spoon with a little admiration and a little sympathy.



A FEW WORDS CONCERNING THE CARE OF THE SKIN AND COMPLEXION.

REPRINTED FROM A "HEALTH LECTURE," BY THE COURTEOUS PERMISSION OF THE LECTURER, DR. ANDREW WILSON,

Lecturer on Health under the "Combe Trust;" Lecturer on Physiology, Edinburgh, &c.

There are few subjects of greater interest and importance in the matter of health, than the proper care and treatment of the skin. Perhaps the importance of the subject stands in inverse ratio to the attention we are popularly inclined to pay it. I make bold to say few persons are aware of the prominent part played by the skin in the maintenance of health, whilst still fewer appreciate the functions of the skin and the duties it is intended by Nature to discharge in the human economy. Whoever said "Cleanliness is next to godliness"—a sentence so valuable that one can hardly wonder at the common idea that it occurs amongst the wisdom of "Proverbs"—must have been a wise man in his day and generation. For it is easy to show that the beginning and the end of a large part of our health exists in the proper care of the skin, and in its freedom from the "sanctity of dirt," a condition extremely prevalent in bygone days. Perhaps the most satisfactory way of opening up to-night the subject of the skin and its functions will be, firstly, to investigate the structure of the skin; then, secondly, to note the duties or functions it performs; and, thirdly, to briefly investigate those common details of skin-management which should be practised by all. The human skin is composed of two chief layers—I have heard ignorant persons credit the race with the possession of three or even four "skins." The outer skin, or *epidermis* or "scarf skin," consists of layers of minute bodies called *cells*. Nearest the surface these cells are mere microscopic scales, measuring each about the $\frac{1}{100}$ th of an inch in breadth. Below, the cells are large, and less scale-like. Hundreds of the upper scales must be given off daily as used-up elements of the skin from all parts of the body, being worn off by the friction of our clothes, and by the act of washing. These cells are, however, being perpetually renewed from below. The outer skin is, in fact, a growth from the under skin, and it is just when the outer and under layers of the skin join that the colour of the skin is developed. The under-skin, or *dermis*, is a very different layer from the epidermis. The latter has no nerves nor blood-vessels; whilst the dermis is so thickly supplied with both, that we cannot prick any part of the body with the finest needle without drawing blood and feeling pain. In shaving, we draw a practical and necessary distinction between the non-sensitive epidermis and the sensitive under-layer. The dermis or under skin rests in its turn on the fat and cellular tissue of the body. It is composed of tolerably tough fibres, and it is well supplied with blood-vessels. Again, the delicate twigs of the nerves end in the under skin, and are found inside certain little projections called *papillæ*. When I touch this table, for example, I feel it through the outer skin, by means of the nerves and papillæ of the under skin. These papillæ are most abundant on the palms of the hands and fingers and on the soles of the feet. Such a fact might have been inferred from the sensitiveness of these parts. When we magnify the skin, say of the palm of the hand, we can readily see the raised lines, each composed of a double row of papillæ. A papilla measures about the $\frac{1}{100}$ th of an inch in length, and $\frac{1}{300}$ th of an inch in diameter at the base. Within each papilla is a network of blood-vessels and a nerve fibre, which may, however, end in various ways. The skin has two sets of glands associated with it. Deep down in the skin and below the true skin, the microscope shows us in a section of this membrane numerous little coiled-up tubes. From each coil there ascends to the surface of the skin the end of the tube. This ends in a skin pore. The coil is the *sweat-gland*, and the tube is its duct, whereby the sweat is poured forth on the skin-surface. These glands are most numerous in the palms and soles. Over 2700, according to one author, exist to the square inch in the palm of the hand; whilst over 3500 are calculated by Sir Erasmus Wilson to exist per square inch in the same situation. In the neck and back, the sweat-glands are least numerous. There, they do not average more than 400 or so to the square inch. In the whole body, the total number of sweat-glands has been set down at nearly two millions and a half; and it has been calculated that if the glands were uncoiled, and extended one after the other in a straight line, we should find that there were twenty-eight miles of sweat-tubes in the body. In addition to the sweat-glands, we find certain other glands, called *sebaceous glands*, in the skin. These latter are most

abundant on hairy parts, and are wanting in the regions where the sweat-glands are thickest. They appear to pour out on the skin-surface an oily fluid, and frequently open into the sheaths of hairs. Hence we conclude their function is connected with the nourishment of the hair.

So much for the structure of the skin. Now the uses of this membrane may be briefly summed up by saying that, firstly, it serves as a protective membrane to the body; secondly, it regulates the temperature of the blood, through its presenting a large surface to the outer air; thirdly, it serves to get rid of waste matters; and, fourthly, it acts as an organ of touch, and stands thus as a means of communication between ourselves and the external world. It is specially with the second and third of these uses that we have to concern ourselves to-night. We know by experience that "catching a cold" is, unfortunately, only a too easy matter; but few persons reflect upon the share which the skin, through ignorance and carelessness, is made to play in the process. When we allow a chill to affect the skin, especially when its blood-vessels are full of blood, as they are after exertion, and when its glands are actively discharging their secretion, a peculiar influence passes to the nerves of the skin; this influence is propagated inwards, comes to affect the lining membrane of the nose and throat, or the lungs themselves, and then succeeds the "cold in the head," or in the chest, as the case may be. Hence one of the great rules of health must consist in our care of the skin-surface. We must guard against chills, and undue exposure, if we are to keep free from colds and coughs. For a cold, as a rule, is the physiological penalty that follows neglect of the skin, and the too sudden change from a heated atmosphere—itsself an insanitary condition—to a cooler one. The functions of the skin as an organ of excretion—that is, for getting rid of waste matters—correspond to those of the lungs and kidneys. Skin, lungs, and kidneys form, in fact, a kind of physiological trio, performing essentially the same work—namely, that of eliminating from our bodies the waste matters which inevitably attend every act and process of living and being. What, you may ask, are the waste matters got rid of by the skin? I reply, chiefly heat, water, carbonic acid gas, minerals, and small quantities of other matters. You may have little idea how complex a fluid sweat is. In 1000 parts, sweat, when analysed, is found to consist of 995 parts of water and 5 parts of solids. The latter consist of complex organic acids, minerals (chiefly common salt), fats, and skin *débris*. Of water, the skin of an adult gets rid of between $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. and 2 lb. daily. And if you ask me where these waste matters come from, I reply from the blood, which is the great source at once of nourishment and of waste in the living organism. The sweat-glands, we should remember, are always acting. Not that we are always sensible of perspiring; but, as a matter of fact, we are continually performing that process. The healthy skin is a moderately moist skin, and contrasts very markedly with the dry skin of the fever patient, or of the unhealthy person. How, then, it may be asked, do the sweat-glands contrive to separate these waste matters from the blood? Their action may readily be understood. Each sweat-gland, as we have seen, is a coiled-up tube. Outside the glands is a dense network of blood-vessels. Hence the waste matters in the blood are separated from the inside of the sweat-gland by what?—Only by the thin wall of the blood-vessel, and the equally thin wall of the air-tube. In virtue of certain laws regulating the passage of fluids and gases through thin membranes, we accordingly find that the watery constituents of the blood, the carbonic acid gas, and other matters, strain or transude through the walls of the blood-vessels and through those of the sweat-glands. Thence the sweat passes upwards to be exuded through the pores on the skin-surface. A similar process of filtering waste matters from the blood into the interior of a tube occurs in the kidney. Summing up the work of the skin, I may add that in twenty-four hours a healthy adult will excrete from the skin about 18 oz. of water, about 300 gr. of solid matters, and about 400 gr. of carbonic acid gas.

The care of the skin is a matter to which, as I have already remarked, few persons pay that heed of attention the subject demands. In the first place, the necessity for frequently and thoroughly cleansing the skin—

the absolute necessity, I would say, for hot or tepid baths—is clearly demonstrated, when you reflect that every day the scarf skin is throwing off its old cells, that every hour the invisible perspiration is collecting on the skin-surface, and that our clothing, however clean, is likewise liable to retard the free action of this membrane. Whoever can promote the erection of baths in the populous districts of our great cities, and encourage their frequent use by all classes of society, will prove himself a public benefactor and a health-reformer of no mean power. The cold bath is a stimulant valuable as inuring us to cold, and as guarding and bracing us against the effects of chill. But the true cleanser is a hot bath, and only under the efficient action of hot water can the skin be made to part with its refuse-matter. One important caution should here be given, and that is one concerning the use of soaps. I would strongly advise all who care for their skin to eschew the use of the common yellow soap, which, with its excess of alkali, simply roughens and injures the skin. Likewise, if you will be advised by me, I would say never buy those odoriferous abominations commonly sold under the name of "Scented or Fancy Soaps." Loaded, as chemists tell us, with colouring matters, and reeking with bad oils, they possess neither cleansing nor emollient properties, and they are the frequent causes of skin eruptions. If I am to recommend any soap at all to you, as a satisfactory and scientifically prepared article, I would certainly advise you to buy and use Pears' Soap. Not merely from personal use can I recommend this soap, but I am well content to shelter myself under the names and authority of Sir Erasmus Wilson, of Dr. Stevenson Macadam, Professors Redwood and Atfield, and of other well-known physicians and chemists, who declare that Pears' Soap contains no colouring matter whatever, and that it is a pure soap, well calculated to cleanse and purify the skin. Furthermore, I believe economical people will find this Soap very much to their taste. It contains little or no water, and in this respect differs from all other soaps; hence a cake of Pears' is really soap *in toto*, and not so much oil, alkali, and colouring matter plus a mass of water. I know of cases of irritable skin which the whole tribe of "glycerine soaps" failed to allay, but which disappeared under the use of Pears' Soap; and for the nursery and for the delicate skin of infancy, no better or more soothing soap can be used. There can be no doubt that in respect of the care of children, attention to the skin is specially required. Of necessity, also, the nature of the applications we bring in contact with the delicate skin of infancy becomes a topic of importance to mothers and nurses. If common soaps are irritating to the skin of the adult, as they unquestionably are, they are doubly and trebly injurious to the delicate skin of the infant and young child. I can vouch, from the testimony of intelligent mothers, that the Soap I am recommending is not merely a safe but an advantageous one for the nursery. It does not irritate the skin; but, whilst serving as a detergent and cleanser, also acts as an emollient. The care of the complexion is, of course, a wide topic, and one which concerns us all; but I should like to warn you that there is no one sovereign remedy for a clear skin, no panacea for rendering the complexion healthy. What will do so, however, is attention to the general health. Moderate and, above all, temperate living, and especially in the matter of stimulants; an avoidance of rich and over-nutritious foods; the eschewing of beer in particular, and of other malt liquors where any tendency to skin troubles exists; and frequent baths with the use of a pure soap, such as that I have recommended—these are the great rules for the healthy skin. For, as an unhealthy skin is an indication of general ill-health, so the care of the general health, conversely, is the best conducive to the health of the body-covering. One of the things we are apt to grumble at in France is the providing of one's own soap at hotels. Permit me to remark that this is one of those things "they manage better in France" than we do here. I am strongly of opinion that everyone should in travelling carry his or her own soap with them, as you carry your own hair-brushes or your own sponge. There can be no better providing in this respect for the hot sun and the warm winds and dust of travel than a cake or two of "Pears," which, under such circumstances, I have found very efficient in the prevention of sunburn and allied annoyances.

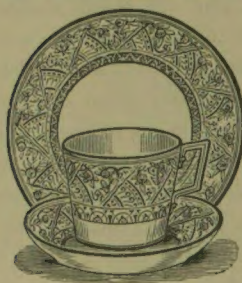
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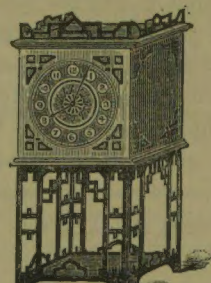
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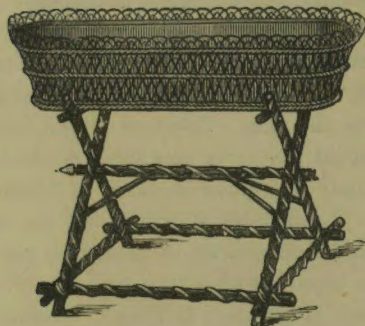
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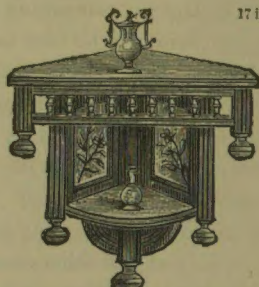
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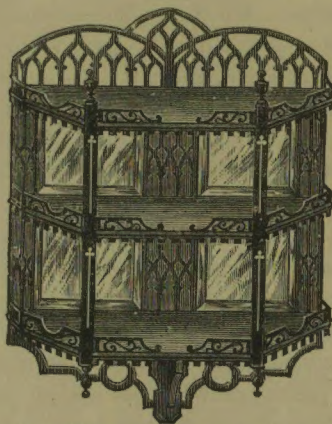
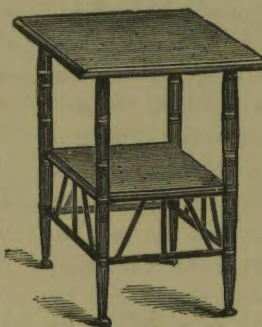
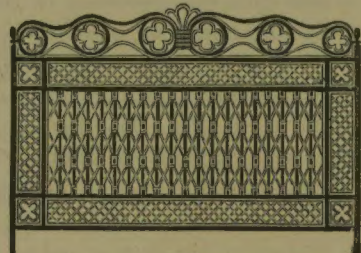
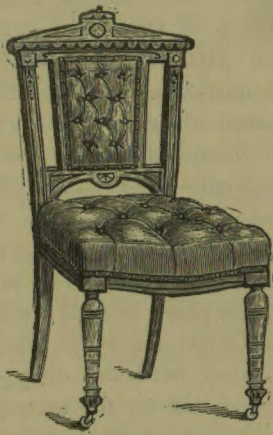
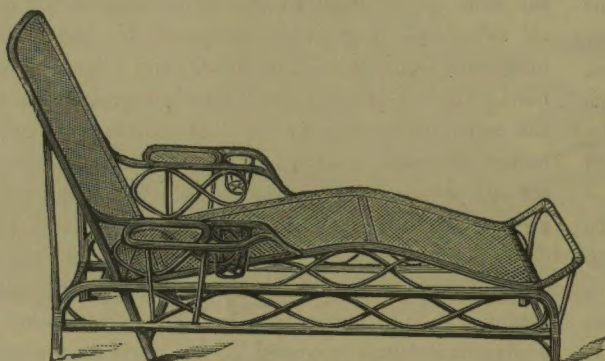
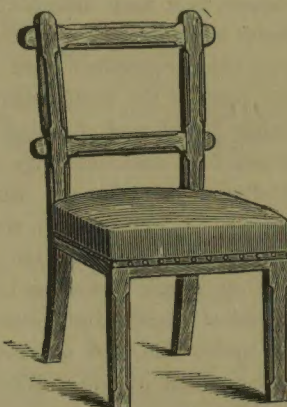


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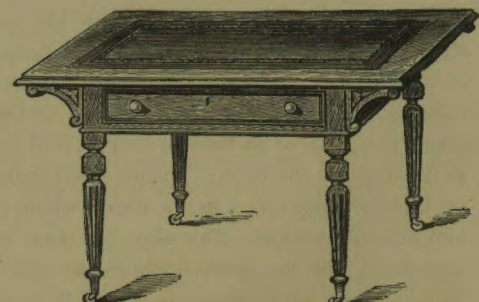
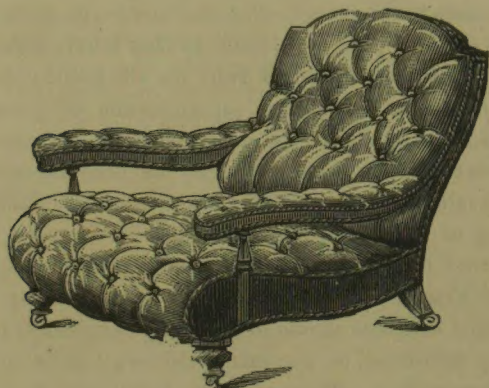
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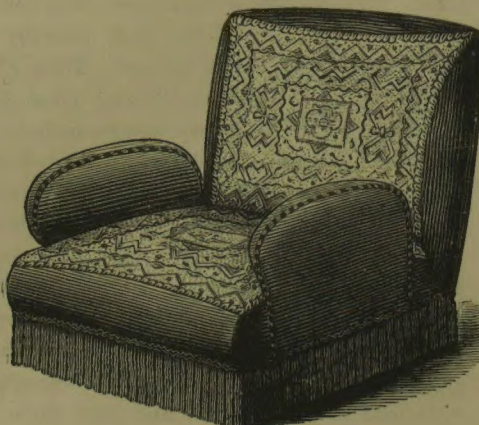
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